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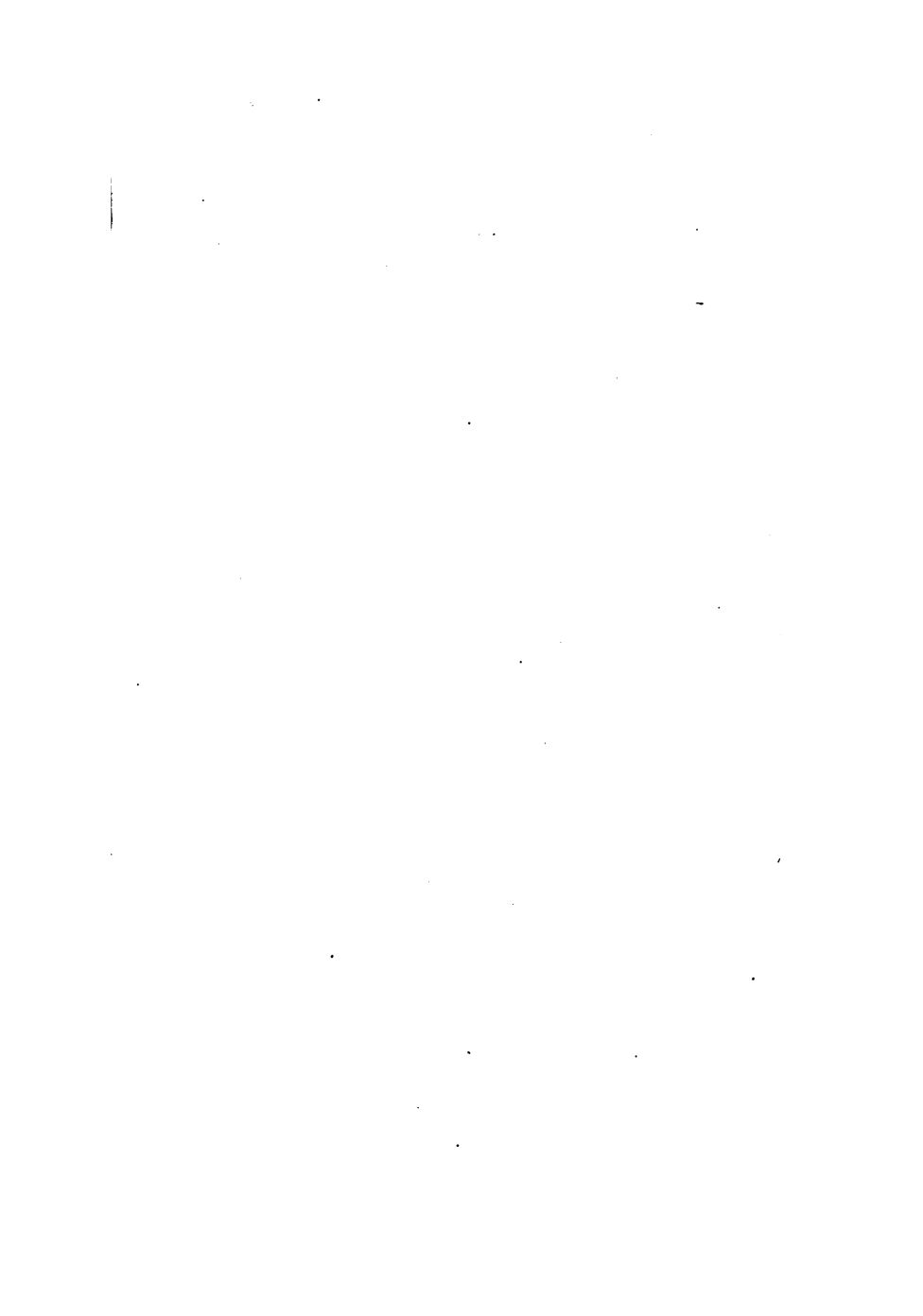
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Damen's Ghost

Bynner, Edwin Lassetter



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CONTENTS.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE GROUND-HOG AND THE WEASEL	1
II. ONLY A LAWYER'S NOTE	12
III. FATE OR FANCY	23
IV. THE ONNHETON	31
V. ATTORNEY AND CLIENT	45
VI. A BUSINESS EVENING	48
VII. HOME GOSSIP	56
VIII. OTHER PILGRIMS	60
IX. THE GHOST	74
X. A FIELD-DAY	81
XI. THE FRENCH PLAY	89
XII. THE POORHOUSE	97
XIII. THE WRONG PART	107

BOOK II.

I. BEASTS OF PREY	115
II. "UNCLE DICK"	121
III. "LOOK WHERE IT COMES AGAIN!"	129
IV. A CONSULTATION	138
V. A MOONLIGHT TALK	145
VI. A CAST-IRON IMAGE	157
VII. "WIPIN' AND THINKIN'"	167

CHAPTER	PAGE
VIII. COBWEBS	174
IX. THE PRINCE AND THE BEGGAR	186
X. ATMOSPHERES	194
XI. GREEK MEETS GREEK	202
XII. A QUIET BARGAIN	209
XIII. DREGS	214

BOOK III.

I. THE NEW HOME	223
II. AN UNEXPECTED VISIT	230
III. CORYDON	242
IV. IT WILL NOT DOWN	248
V. LIGHT	256
VI. A DISCOVERY	263
VII. MRS. GOULD MAKES UP HER MIND	269
VIII. A CRUSHING ANSWER	275
IX. THE RIGHTFUL HEIR	280
X. THE DEFENDANT	285
XI. "THE ERRING SPIRIT HIES TO HIS CONFINES"	296
XII. FOUND	306
XIII. CONCLUSION	310

DAMEN'S GHOST.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE GROUNDHOG AND THE WEASEL.

"MR. FERRETTE?"

"Yes."

"I am Miss Badger."

The two confronted each other for the first time. If they could have foreseen the result of the acquaintance then about to begin, they would have turned, and run away from each other as fast as legs could carry them.

"V'lumny Badger!"

Mr. Ferrette looked beyond Miss Badger at the speaker. Miss Badger explained, without stepping aside, or otherwise discomposing herself, —

"It is my mother."

Mr. Ferrette bowed with an uncertain air, and fluttered the papers in his hand, as he noted his visitors critically out of the corner of his eye. Mr. Ferrette's brace of clerks regarded the new-comers with a like neutral expression, and the junior whispered the senior, —

"Be blowed if I can make out whether they are straights, transients, or floaters."

"We called on a little matter of business."

"Straights," whispered the junior eagerly.

"Transients," returned the senior, as he hastened forward with chairs for the ladies, catching and reflecting the smile with which Mr. Ferrette was now beaming upon his visitors.

"Excuse me, our business is—could we just as well see you alone?"

"Certainly; of course. This way," said Mr. Ferrette with alacrity, as he ushered the two ladies into his retiring-room.

"Divorce!" whispered the junior, as the door closed upon them.

"Or *crim. con.*," suggested the senior, with an experienced air.

Mr. Ferrette did not refrain from privately rubbing his hands under the desk, as he settled himself to listen to his new client; otherwise his careful indifference of manner was such as to convey, in the highest degree, the impression that strangers on strictly private business were not uncommon visitors at his rooms,—as indeed, if report could be trusted, they were not.

Miss Badger took a seat on his right, while Mrs. Badger shifted her chair several times until she hit upon a place whence she could command a full view, both of her daughter and of Mr. Ferrette.

Miss Badger, quite unheeding of her mother's movements, now threw back her veil. Thus disclosed, she appeared neither a beauty nor a fright: if it were not a violence of speech to say, "intensely commonplace," we should choose that exact phrase to describe Miss Badger. She would never have been noticed in a crowd: one would never have looked twice at her anywhere. A stranger seeing her might perhaps have said, "That woman would be vastly improved by a

pair of eyebrows ;" but he certainly never could have told whether her eyes themselves were light watery gray, or light watery green : for the rest, he might perhaps have carried away a vague impression of a pale, unhealthy skin, a prominent nose, thin, bloodless lips, and masses of dull red hair. A blind person would have remembered Miss Badger better ; her voice was not easily to be forgotten ; it was as thin and flat as if it had been squeezed through a crack.

"We want to git a little law business done."

"Yes? we occasionally do a little in that line here," said Mr. Ferrette in a tone that intimated, "We do a great deal."

"You were very highly recommended to us," said the daughter.

"And we want to get some one that we can rely on," added the mother.

Murmuring something to the effect of, "Hoping to meet expectations that were not too extravagant," Mr. Ferrette smiled alternately upon one lady and the other.

And Mr. Ferrette's smile was something more than an upturning of facial lines : it had a natural charm ; it was in a certain way sensuous, suggesting warmth and color, and not the less irresistible for an occasional fleeting touch of guile ; his velvety black eyes gleamed so brightly under his velvety white brow, his plummy moustache widened, and showed a glimpse of such dazzling teeth, that, in spite of himself, the ordinary client was captivated, lulled to a sense of security, or lured on to a fuller confidence, as the case might require.

Not so Miss Badger : she showed a very unfeminine insensibility to every thing but the matter in hand.

"About this business," she went on in a manner so weak and a voice so flat, that Mr. Ferrette's air of indifference began to admit an infusion of contempt. "I ought to say our means are limited."

Miss Badger finished each sentence with a little drawl, the result, apparently, of a former affectation, which had crystallized into a habit. She had also a way of feebly smacking or re-arranging her lips after any speech of importance, either as if congratulating herself on the last utterance, or getting in train for the next.

"Very limited indeed," she continued; "and if—that is, before we begin, we'd like to know what it would probably cost."

"That," returned Mr. Ferrette with excusable facetiousness, "it would be rather difficult to say until I know what's to be done."

"Well, p'r'aps so; but we *have* to consider the expense, you see, an' we don't want to undertake any thing beyond our means. This is a very important matter, very important indeed," — Miss Badger stopped to cough slightly, and smooth back a stray lock of hair, while she carefully noted the effect of her words.

"'T seems a great pity to give it up," — Miss Badger coughed again, — "but then, if your charges are high, why," — Miss Badger finished her cough, — "it would be better not to begin at all."

"As for that," returned Mr. Ferrette, casting a critical glance over his client's toilet, "you must, of course, judge for yourself. I always try to make my charges reasonable; but, if you will give me a little idea of your case, I can tell better."

"If we should win the case," continued Miss Badger, disregarding, for the second time, the hint of her counsel, "it would be all right, of course; but, if we should lose it" —

"You always have to take your chances in a lawsuit."

"But, as I was goin' to say, if we lost it we couldn't, — that is, we might not be able to pay you at all."

Mr. Ferrette shrugged his shoulders.

"We thought, p'raps — mother had an idea that you might be willin' to take the risk yourself" —

Mr. Ferrette's face fell; he did not speak.

"That is to say, if you won the case, we might pay you a little more, an' if you didn't" —

Mr. Ferrette, regarding his desk with a scowl, did not help his client out.

"Lawyers sometimes do that, don't they?"

"Third-rate lawyers do it, but it isn't considered professional."

Mr. Ferrette emphasized the last word, and studied Miss Badger askance. Her manner was as unimpressive as ever: but, somehow, Mr. Ferrette's indifference had entirely disappeared, and he regarded her with a look at once curious and searching.

"You don't think, then, you would be willin' to undertake the case on such terms?" said Miss Badger, making a movement as if to rise.

"You haven't stated your case yet," returned Mr. Ferrette, in a tone of suppressed exasperation.

"But if it was a case you thought worth while to take hold of?"

Mr. Ferrette sat for a minute scowling at his desk; then, rising, he walked cautiously to the door, opened it, looked suspiciously out at his two clerks, closed it with a little slam, walked back to his seat, looked suspiciously about the room, then, bending forward and stretching out his head and neck towards Miss Badger, he said, in a low tone, —

"It isn't my practice to take cases in this way. I never do it, in fact. Generally speaking, it isn't professional. If, however, you have an important case, and you are without means to prosecute it, for the sake of helping you, and seeing justice done, I might be prevailed on to undertake it. But you understand it is a matter strictly between ourselves. I wouldn't do it for anybody else, and it must not go beyond this room on any account."

"Mother and I ain't very likely to tell about it," returned Miss Badger coolly, as, having carried her first point, she proceeded to unfold from her pocket-handkerchief a written paper, which she handed to Mr. Ferrette, saying, —

"I s'pose you'll have to read that, to begin with."

"A will," said the latter, opening the paper.

Mrs. Badger pushed her spectacles high up on the bridge of her nose, cleared her throat, and kept her eye fixed steadily upon Mr. Ferrette as he carefully read the paper from beginning to end.

"Is that a good will?" asked both women in a chorus, when he raised his eyes.

"Do you want to break it, or stand by it?" asked the lawyer cautiously.

"Why, do you see any thing wrong about it?" inquired Miss Badger.

"Nothing exactly wrong, perhaps."

"Any thing doubtful?"

"Why, all wills, generally speaking, are more or less doubtful."

"But about those two legacies?"

"Marked with a lead-pencil?"

"Yes."

"They *seem* to be all right."

Miss Badger cast a blandly triumphant look at her mother.

"Wait, V'lumny," returned the latter loftily.

Mrs. Badger's glasses were pushed tight up to her eyes. She was perched upon the very tip of her chair, and, altogether, seemed in a state of extreme though perfectly controlled agitation.

"But, as I have already suggested," continued Mr. Ferrette, "perhaps it would be better now to state to me the facts of your case, before I attempt to answer any more questions."

"If those legacies are all right, as you say," pursued

Miss Badger, as if she had not heard the last remark, "they'd oughter been paid, hadn't they?"

"If there was any thing to pay them with."

"Any thing to pay them with!" repeated Mrs. Badger derisively.

"I think, mother, that if" —

"Go on, go on: I ain't goin' to interfere."

"The folks that got the money don't seem to suffer for any thing," answered Miss Badger in a tone whose meekness did not prevent it from reeking with insinuation.

"Am I to infer, then, that they were not paid, and that you have an interest in them? I beg pardon: pray proceed, and state your case."

Miss Badger did proceed, and did state her case, but entirely after her own fashion.

"Did you notice the date?"

"Yes, 1840."

"But it wasn't proved till" —

"1845."

"That's fifteen years ago."

"Yes."

"Then isn't it outlawed?"

"What?"

"The will."

"Why," said Mr. Ferrette, hesitating, "generally speaking, any claim to personal property under the will would be barred by this time."

"V'lummy, there" —

Miss Badger paid not the slightest attention to her mother, but a noticeable change came over her own face. The pupils of her pale eyes dilated till the eyes themselves were as black as coals.

"But" —

"If a thing's outlawed, it's outlawed, and that's an end of it!" interposed Mrs. Badger vigorously.

"Isn't there any way we can git at it?"

"You haven't told me yet, I think, what you want

to get at," returned Mr. Ferrette with a withering smile.

"Why," explained Miss Badger in a mere vocal skin of voice, "the man that made that will left some money to my father and my uncle, and it has never been paid."

"Ah! they were the legatees?"

"Yes."

"Are they living now?"

"Yes, both of 'em."

"Why didn't they claim the money before?"

"'Cause they were numskulls!" interjected Mrs. Badger.

"They did!" answered Miss Badger.

"And why didn't they get it?"

"'Cause that woman wouldn't give it up."

"The executrix?"

"Yes."

"What reason did she give for refusing?"

"Reason!"

"Mother!"

Mrs. Badger settled back in her chair with a loud, derisive sniff, while her daughter continued, —

"She gave any reason that came handy, I s'pose."

Mr. Ferrette looked up quickly at his client, and gradually his whole scalp seemed to slip forward like a modern rolling-desk, an inch or more, and settle in a thick fold over his eyes, which gleamed darkly beneath.

"Then you have cause to think," he said, lowering his voice, "that every thing wasn't quite right" —

"Right! young man," broke in Mrs. Badger, regardless of her daughter's growing impatience, "I don't know law, an' I don't want to; but I know common sense, an' I know that cheatin' folks out of sixty thousand dollars ain't quite any thing but highway robbery!"

"*You* understand me, Miss Badger," continued the

attorney, in his most insinuating tone, leaning forward and lowering his head, "you have reason to suspect that there may be something — something a little" —

"Eh?"

"Crooked — we will say — about it."

"I may have my suspicions, an' I may not. I never *said* there was any thing crooked about it; but I don't see how anybody can think it's very straight."

"Exactly. Now, it is of the utmost importance that you should give me all the facts in your possession. This is all strictly between ourselves, you understand," said Mr. Ferrette, suddenly straightening up, rolling back his scalp, and smiling with an effect like that produced by the sun shining through the clouds.

"Now, what particular reason have you to suspect," he continued in the most inviting of tones, "that there is something a little — wrong, we will say, in this transaction?"

The sun, however, seemed not yet strong enough to melt the ice of caution in the client's bosom.

"Why, I have the reason that we ought to have had the money, and we didn't git it."

Mr. Ferrette moved uneasily in his chair.

"But what particular reason have you for suspecting that they have not been quite square?"

"Why, I haven't — there isn't any particular — at least, I should think that would be a matter of law for you to find out."

"Not at all: it is purely a matter of fact." Mr. Ferrette scowled, and played with his pen. He began again, —

"Now, haven't you — please give me your attention, this is a matter of importance — haven't you, I say, heard something, or read something, or seen something, or hasn't something come to your knowledge in this matter, *lately*, say, if you please, *within the last six years*, to make you suspect the good faith of these people?"

Miss Badger maintained a guarded silence, and looked rather stupidly at her counsel.

"She hain't heard nothin' but what we told her!"

"Ah, indeed!" said Mr. Ferrette, directing a searching glance at the speaker, "then I will put the same question to you."

"Well, I've heard enough, an' seen enough, an' read enough, an' 'tain't very satisfactory: it's a pretty bad muddle — law an' fact an' all."

"But you knew these people — this executrix and her son?"

"Oh! I've seen 'em."

"Now, madam, refresh your memory! Has no particular circumstance *of late* come to your knowledge? Have they said or done nothing that excited your suspicion?"

"Oh! they've said an' done a good deal; but one thing warn't any more particular'n another."

"But," continued the lawyer, hitching impatiently in his chair, "have you heard nothing *lately* about the case, — nothing within a few years that has given any new light upon their action?"

"Oh, I've heard enough! but 'twas all the same old story."

Mr. Ferrette's scalp rolled slowly forward, and settled again over his eyes; and he sat for some minutes in silence, digging a big splash of ink out of his blotter. When he had got it all nicely cut away, and left instead a fresh pink hole, like a raw wound, he said sullenly, without looking up, —

"I don't see that I can do any thing for you. The claim is barred by the statute of limitations, — outlawed, as you call it. My only hope was, of founding a case of fraud. If there had been any new developments, within six years, of a fraudulent nature, it would have taken the case out of the operation of the statute; but," he continued, in an injured tone, "you don't seem to know your own business; you can't

help me to any such evidence ; it's only another instance where people sacrifice their interests by not taking the proper legal advice ; it's a great pity you did not move in this matter before."

"There, V'lumny, now I hope you're satisfied : that's what I told you 'twould amount to, goin' to a lawyer."

Miss Badger rose with a discontented air, and said coldly, as she adjusted her veil, —

"I don't see how we could have moved in it before, with them in Europe, Asia, or Africa, for aught I knew."

"What !" cried Mr. Ferrette sharply, "have they been away from New York — living out of the State ?"

"To be sure they have, ever since he died."

"Stop a minute : sit down," cried the lawyer, rising briskly. "Why didn't you say so ? This is a sheep of a different color !"

Mr. Ferrette seized and opened a copy of the Revised Statutes, while Miss Badger resumed her seat, and waited in evident suspense.

"When did they return ?" asked Mr. Ferrette eagerly, looking up from his book.

"Two months ago."

"Then you're in time, after all."

"What !" cried Miss Badger breathlessly, her face white as marble, and her eyes black as coals, "it isn't outlawed ?"

"No."

"What are you goin' to do ?"

"Go for this woman at once. Does she live in the city ? What's her address ?"

"There it is," said Miss Badger, producing a card from her pocket.

"Come in again in a week, and I may have something to tell you," said Mr. Ferrette, bowing his clients out.

"V'lumny, I give in," cried Mrs. Badger, pinning her shawl, and catching her breath, as they passed through the door.

CHAPTER II.

ONLY A LAWYER'S NOTE.

JULIUS CÆSAR seated in a curule chair, with a laurel crown upon his head, his right arm leaning upon a copy of his own "Commentaries on the Gallic War," and the left extended in an easy gesture, pointed straight at Anne Gould as she sat alone one afternoon in her own library.

Mrs. Gould showed no surprise at this action on the part of the great Roman, perhaps because she had seen him sitting in that very attitude upon the top of her library-clock for a full score of years or more; perhaps she had long since recovered from her surprise at Cæsar and his doings, and, like the rest of us, was a little weary of him. Certainly it would never have occurred to her, that, as she sat there with the shaded light from the drop-lamp falling upon her shapely head and matronly person, she was the more interesting figure of the two. Yet truly, despite the Gallic conqueror, despite all her sumptuous surroundings, she first claims our attention. By a certain fineness of presence, by a suggested force of character in her clear eye, the aquiline trend of her nose, her firm, clean-cut lips, by the assertive individuality of certain looks and movements, she dwarfs all this fair show of mere things, and sends it glimmering back to the half-light of the picture where it belongs.

She is reading; and it is restful to look at her as she sits there so admirably still, with no shifting about, no nervous see-sawing of hand or foot,—sits and reads on page after page, with her attention fixed

steadily upon the text, and her body in absolute repose.

Six o'clock strikes : she looks up, consults her watch, glances at the fire, looks around the room, and returns to her book. But now, from time to time, she stops to listen to a hurrying footstep in the street, or the opening and shutting of a distant door : her mind has admitted a distraction.

And here, at last, comes the cause of it with quick, careless tread, up the stairs, and directly one of those odd little movements of anticipation passes over the reader : she straightens back in her chair, unconsciously smooths her hair, passes her hand over the folds of her dress, and all without raising her eyes from the page.

But she does raise them at length, very calmly and deliberately, and without in the least betraying the quickened beating of her mother's heart, as the door is flung open, and a tall young man comes striding into the room.

"Well, truant !"

"Well, old lady !"

"Late again."

"Late ? not at all."

"Look at the clock."

"Pooh ! that wretched timepiece can't be depended upon ; it's always late : it may have been a very useful and ornamental member of society a quarter of a century ago, but it's had its day."

"Unhappily for your theory, just now it is five minutes too slow."

"Oh ! well, we will not split hairs : it's always too something or other : it isn't correct, that's the point !" returned the young man, throwing himself upon a low stool, and putting his head familiarly in his mother's lap. "How are you ? Pretty cross to-night ?" he continued, as he stretched his long legs out towards the fire, and arranged himself comfortably on his seat.

One little scrap from St. Simon's noted picture of Fénelon will give better one's first impression of Oliver Gould than pages of labored analysis, to wit : "It required an effort to cease looking at him." As he sat now at his mother's feet, with his face in the shadow, he seemed only a tall, lean young man, with big feet and hands, a good, vigorous head, features neither handsome nor ill-looking, and, when he spoke, those undefined intonations by which members of a certain high and noble guild recognize each other in Vanity Fair. Dressed in a dark gray suit, lighted up at the neck with a scarf of sapphire silk, he seemed simply a fair type of the well-born, well-bred young American — this, and nothing more. But, when he turned towards the light, one presently saw that there was something behind the eyes ; and possibly it was this something behind the eyes that made it such "an effort to cease looking at him."

His mother, meanwhile, went on with her book, without answering his idle question.

"I beg pardon !"

Still no answer. •

"Louder, please !" continued the saucy youth, reaching back to seize the obnoxious book.

"Noll," said his mother, absently caressing the close-clipped yellow head in her lap, and giving him, at length, a passing thought as she turned a leaf, "where have you been wasting this fine long afternoon?"

"Playing billiards at the club ; and let me say that playing billiards, where you give your mind to it, is a deucedly exhaustive sort of business ; and what I was coming at is, that, if you're not particularly savage, I wish you would hurry up dinner."

"You know I disapprove of your playing billiards so much."

"Oh, yes ! I know you disapprove habitually of my most cherished tastes and habits ; but, that makes me think I have a little suggestion to make."

The reader, however, was already deep in her book again.

"Are suggestions in order?"

Receiving no answer, the persistent youth by a happy flank movement, succeeded at length in capturing his hated rival, the book; when his indulgent mamma, without more ado, took off her eyeglass, and yielded to her filial tormentor.

"Now, Queeny dear," he continued, seizing her hands in his big palms, "are you in a melting mood?"

"After such polite and deferential treatment" —

"Oh! well, tut, tut, that goes for nothing: you were snubbing me. Now to the point. I have a request to make."

"Is it possible?"

"There, never mind being sarcastic, please. You know, as a matter of fact, that I seldom ask for any thing; and it's only absolute necessity in this case. Will you buy me a billiard-table?"

"Certainly not!"

"And why?"

"Because it would be extravagant and unreasonable."

"My dearest Queeny, do you know you are getting — unconsciously, of course — into a very inconvenient habit of thinking most all my wants unreasonable?"

"I fear you could not pay a greater tribute to my good sense."

"Too much good sense is like too much salt in your soup: it spoils what otherwise would be excellent. Now, you should do like me, — restrain yourself in this respect. Do not always be as sensible as you can. I have the same enormous good sense that you have, but I don't think proper always to show too much of it."

"Indeed you do not," said the mother with an involuntary smile: "we could often, in your case, bear a little more without being oppressed with your excellence."

"There ! you are getting cutting, as usual. That, now, is another thing that mars the shining perfection of your character. You can never argue a point in cold blood : you are hot-headed and rash, and get savage. But to return to the question. This habit of criticising me is growing upon you : you are too sweeping ; you do not discriminate between the times when I am severely sensible, and those other guarded moments when I think best to refrain from being as sensible as I can."

"The trouble may be that the former occasions do not occur often enough to produce any marked effect on your general behavior."

"My dear mother ! this is all very brilliant, but it is aside from the point."

"The point is, that you want something you ought not to have, and I do not choose to allow it."

"There's the exact trouble with you, Queeny : you have no maternal instincts. Why, even the brutes will supply their young with necessities."

"Well, poor as it is, I may perhaps accept that compliment without presumption," returned Mrs. Gould, regarding her son with an intent look, while she mechanically retorted his badinage. "I flatter myself that I have, indeed, a little more discretion than the brutes."

"Yes ; but you have none of their winning little maternal weaknesses. Now, with regard to me, you look upon me only as an object of discipline, as a thing to be regulated and organized."

"And so you are ; and I am beginning to despair of your ever being any thing else."

"Heigho !" sighed the young man.

"Noll !" exclaimed his mother, suddenly changing her voice, "get up, and take a chair, and let us have ten minutes of reasonable conversation. Be a man for a bit. I'm going to talk business, and I want your thought and attention."

"Aha!" cried the young man, jumping up "that, now, is what I like,—something good and hard-headed. Go on: I'll be as reasonable as George Washington."

"I was thinking of you to-day, my boy; and I've been thinking of you a great deal lately, and I'm afraid I've spoiled you."

"Not a doubt of it."

"I've made life too easy for you."

"Altogether."

"It would have been better if you had been knocked about more."

"Just what I always told you."

"Pay attention, my son, and see if you can refrain a few minutes from trifling."

"Trifling, indeed! I'm keeping the run of the discourse perfectly. I'm spoiled, that's the gist of it, so far; and I ought to understand that, for I've been told it every day these ten years."

"But I want now to bring home to you the fact, that I have at last seen my mistake, that I have taken new resolutions with regard to you, and that I count upon your co-operation. I have come up here from the country at a great personal sacrifice. I have given up all my habits and friends there, to come back to this noisy town, which I hate, that you may see something of the world and of life, that you may go into business and society, and learn the practical side of things."

"Exactly: the best thing you ever did in your life. Any objection to my smoking this cigar?"

"It may prove the worst," returned the mother, turning about with knitted brows, and speaking with a force and emphasis that astonished her son. "It will inevitably prove the worst unless you realize that life is something more than a comedy,—unless you understand that there is such a thing as duty, and take hold of it like a man."

"Duty? I'm up to any thing. Lead on :

'Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going,' "

he exclaimed, in an undertone, adding with an uncontrollable boyish drollery, as he picked up the poker, and fell to knocking to pieces a lump of coal.

" "And such an instrument I was to use.' "

"I have been weak enough to want to keep you a child," pursued the mother with a seriousness that gradually extorted a respectful attention from her listener, "to dread to have you grow up ; but I see too late my own weakness and folly. I cannot make a new scheme of things. I cannot keep you as you were : I can only strive to make you what you ought to be. Three weeks ago you became, in the eyes of the law, a man. You came then into legal possession of your property. Henceforth you are invested with grave responsibilities : you have to learn your duty as a man, as a citizen, as a member of society, — learn it, and fulfil it, so that you will not discredit the blood in your veins, nor the honorable name you bear."

"The trouble with you is, Queeny dear," returned the young man, as he indolently repressed a yawn, "you were born two thousand years too late. This, unfortunately, is not the age of Leonidas, Alexanders, and that sort of chap : the breed is run out nowadays."

"Pooh, pooh !" said the mother impatiently : "it is as much the age of great men as it ever was. There are just as great things to do, and far greater than any Alexander ever did : it needs but the man. Now, my son, the world is before you. A career is open to you. The time is rife with opportunities. The question is, Will you use them? will you seize them? will you do any thing but idle and trifle your life away? But there is the bell !" she exclaimed, interrupting herself with housewifely punctuality : "let us have done for

the present. Bear in mind what I have said, and remember that I shall look for a little serious, manly co-operation on your part. Now we will go to dinner."

"Meantime you have taken away all my appetite," returned the young man, rising, and offering his arm. "You talk like Zenobia, Boadicea, the mother of the Gracchi, and all the rest of those old termagants, to-night. Did it ever occur to you," he went on, seating himself opposite his mother at the table, and regarding her with a quizzical look as she gravely unfolded her napkin,—"did it ever occur to you, I say, Queeny, that a stranger would receive a very disagreeable impression from that uncompromising manner of yours? He would get no idea at all of the real amiability and yielding softness of your disposition. But let us hear now your specific objections to a billiard-table."

"My objections are," returned Mrs. Gould, waking from a little revery, "that it is a needless expense, that you will tire of it in three weeks, and that I cannot afford it."

"But why cannot I afford it myself?"

"Because no one can ever afford a thing that is unreasonable."

"Which is all a purely comparative matter: what is unreasonable for one is reasonable enough for another. A girl wants a piano to play upon, and she gets it; I want a billiard-table, and I don't. The two desires are equally reasonable: they are both mere cravings of our frail human nature for something to relieve the hard drudgery of life."

Mrs. Gould made a movement of impatience.

"Now," continued her son, ignoring the threatened interruption, "you make a great flourish of trumpets about my coming of age, coming into my property, having an income, and this, that, and the other; while here I am in reality suffering for the necessities of

life. Such is the irony of fate," he concluded, finishing his last spoonful of soup.

"Irony of fiddlestick! Noll, you are too ridiculous to be answered at all. How do you think up such arrant rubbish to say?"

"Rubbish! my dear mamma, rubbish! I defy you to find the equal of that for sound sense in English literature."

"I should despair of finding its equal for nonsense, my dear, outside of Joe Miller. You have, it is true, come of age, but I grieve to see that it is not an age of discretion: you have, too, a sufficient income to afford what it is best for you to have."

"Humph! isn't that glitteringly general and indefinite!"

"I shall make it more definite at my leisure. I have already told you that I shall take a day as soon as I get a little settled here, and talk over your affairs, showing what you have, the care that has been taken of it, and the condition it is now in. But I will warn you at the outset that you need not entertain any magnificent expectations. You are not a millionaire."

"Well, that is a relief, to begin with."

"But you are well-to-do; and the best of all is, your money is safely invested, so that, if you are prudent and do not squander it, you are sure of having a good income all your life."

Mrs. Gould's tone and manner were as confident as her words. Perhaps experience justified her in trusting thus implicitly to her own strong will and clear judgment. It was, however, a curious coincidence, that just at this moment the postman's ring was heard, a handful of letters was brought in, and the first one that she opened was this:—

DEAR MADAM,—I am informed that you are the executrix under the will of the late James Gould, who died in this city in 1845.

I write to you now in the interests of Messrs. Stephen and

Peter Badger, who were made legatees by the said will in the amount of thirty thousand dollars each. I am told by the Messrs. Badger that nothing has ever been paid to them on account of the said legacies, but that, for reasons best known to yourself, you have declined to pay the same.

You may or may not be surprised to hear that you are liable on your executor's bond for the full amount of these legacies, and that the legatees have a perfectly good present cause of action against you.

Being intrusted with the interests of the Messrs. Badger, I must press for an immediate settlement of their claim; and hereby give you notice, that, failing to secure a satisfactory arrangement with you, they will appeal to the courts for the adjustment of their rights.

Very respectfully,

NICHOLAS FERRETTE.

"What does the man mean?" cried Mrs. Gould, throwing down the letter.

"Who?"

"Why, here is some fellow — a lawyer, I suppose — has the impudence to try and blackmail me. I don't know what else to call it."

"Ha! he must be hard up for a subject! What does he say? What's it all about?"

"He coolly requests me — it is almost too farcical even for a joke — to hand over to him a small matter of — let me see," she continued, adjusting her eyeglass, "sixty thousand dollars or so."

"Well, it was considerate of him to mention the sum, — such an admirable habit, exactness. Is he good enough to give his reasons for bestowing this polite attention upon you?"

"Oh! it is those graceless Badgers: as if your father had not done enough for them, and far too much, when he was alive."

"What is that old family row? S'pose I've heard it a dozen times, but I never paid any attention. How came these Badgers so deep in papa's good graces?"

"Their father helped him when he was a young man, but he has already doubly made it up to them. It was only his extreme conscientiousness that prompted him to remember them in his will; and, if he had not sunk all his personal property in those last unhappy speculations, they would have come into a pretty penny."

"And so this broth's of their brewing. What does the fellow say?"

"Oh! it's only a lawyer's note. He threatens me with, I don't know what—a lawsuit, I think—if the money is not forthcoming. But there it is: read for yourself."

"Ah!" exclaimed Oliver, as he finished the letter, "that is rather racy, isn't it? What are you going to do?"

"Nothing, of course."

"How would it do for me to go down and give him a drubbing?"

"It wouldn't do at all. The man is but a tool, and worth no such distinguished attention."

"Bravo, Queeny, those are the tactics. I think he sent his letter just at this moment purposely, to do me out of my billiard-table. I don't know what else he could have expected."

"Perhaps he thought," suggested Mrs. Gould quietly, "I was a silly old woman from the country, and he could scare me."

"Unhappy man!" exclaimed Noll, as he rose from the table. "He never made a more signal mistake in his mortal life, did he?"

"We shall see," said Mrs. Gould with significant firmness.

CHAPTER III.

FATE OR FANCY.

AND now Clotho takes up the new and shining thread which her sister is dreamily pulling from the distaff, and, with a bitter smile, weaves it into the checkered web ; while she of the "abhorred shears" looks patiently on, and waits her turn. To merely human eyes, aside from Clotho's smile, it was the merest matter of chance that Helen Houghton came to be left alone in Mrs. Gould's drawing-room. She had come with her mother to make a first call upon Mrs. Gould in her new city home. The latter was just starting for the *dépôt* to say good-by to a friend bound for the seat of war, to whom she wished to intrust a package for her brother-in-law, Col. Richard Gould, then in command of one of the regiments in the Union army. There was no time for ceremony. Greeting her visitors, therefore, cordially, but in the fewest words, Mrs. Gould, without more ado, took the elder lady away in her *coupé* for company, saying hurriedly to the younger as she left the room, —

"Excuse me, my dear, I have not a moment to talk ; I wish we had a seat for you, but we shall not be long ; meantime, here are pictures, here are books, here is the piano, here is the whole house at your service ; and if Noll, if my son, comes in, you must introduce yourself, and say I left word for him to entertain you till we get back."

The young lady smilingly nodded assent ; the two mammas rustled out and drove off, leaving Miss Helen

Houghton to herself ; and it all happened in the most simple and natural way in the world.

Before proceeding to exhaust the resources that had been lavished upon her, the young lady seated herself in a low chair, and took a leisurely and critical survey of the room. Observing a large pier-glass she rose mechanically, and went and stood before it, viewed herself attentively, gave her bonnet various little pokes, and shook out her ruffles and flounces. Presently she sauntered back to the table, and spent some minutes in looking over the books and pictures with a listless air. The silvery bell of the mantle-clock sounded the hour. Putting up a daintily-gloved hand to mask a little yawn, she looked idly around to see the time, when her eye fell upon the piano. Straightway she pulled off her gloves, sat down, and began to play a piece of music that lay open upon the rest. She soon became absorbed in picking it out ; so absorbed, in fact, that she did not, for some time, notice a tall young man who was standing in the doorway, hat in hand, staring at her in evident astonishment.

"Oh, mercy !" she cried, starting up when she perceived him, "how you frightened me !"

"I beg pardon : I did not know" —

"Oh ! it's nothing : only I didn't hear you come in, and" —

"I am very sorry."

"You are Mr. Noll, — that is, Mr. Oliver Gould, I suppose ?"

"Yes."

"I have been expecting you."

"Indeed !"

"That is, I mean, — I was told you might, perhaps, come in."

"Oh, yes !"

"You don't know me, do you ?"

"I believe I haven't that honor."

"I am Miss Houghton."

"Ah ! very happy, I am sure. Shall I, — does my mother know?"

"Oh, yes ! she is gone out."

"Ah !"

"You wonder how I came here : I suppose I ought to explain."

"Oh ! not at all."

"But I must, or you will not understand."

"Yes, to be sure ; very true."

"Well, then, you must know your mother and my mother are very old friends. We came here this afternoon to make a call. Your mother was obliged to go away to meet somebody at the dépôt : so she took my mother with her for company, and I was left here to amuse myself."

"That was very thoughtless indeed of Queeny, — I mean *my* mother."

"Oh, no ! she told me she expected you, and, if you came in, to introduce myself, and tell you — that is — but it is of no consequence."

"What?"

"That you must — But never mind : you needn't, you know."

"That I must take you home?"

"Oh, dear, no !" cried the young lady, struggling with a rebellious little laugh. "Do you want to get rid of me so soon?"

"I beg pardon," said Oliver, turning red, and looking much discomfited.

"Oh, never mind ! I'll forgive you ; but I'm not to be disposed of so easily as that," she continued, with a comical little wag of her head.

"I didn't mean" —

"Oh ! of course not : I understand."

"But I think you ought to give me my mother's message."

"I would, but I fear it may not prove a pleasant one."

"I must be the judge of that."

"You must when you hear it ; but," she continued, looking down upon the keys, and playing a little running accompaniment to her words, "I don't know as I shall tell you."

Oliver regarded the strange young woman before him with a look of astonishment that verged closely upon indignation. He evidently did not quite relish her tone of badinage.

"But, excuse me : I—I do not consider you have exactly the right to withhold a message that was left for me," he continued gravely.

"Oh, yes, I have ! at any rate, I think I shall," retorted the young lady, thrumming away with an air of intense enjoyment of the scene.

"Certainly, by all means, if you wish to amuse yourself."

"Oh, now !" she cried with a silvery little laugh, "you're getting real cross about it, I declare."

"I beg pardon ! I'm nothing of the sort !" returned Oliver, in high dudgeon.

"Oh, yes, you are ! And now I've a good mind to tell, just to punish you for getting angry with me."

"It is useless, I suppose, for me to protest"—

"Oh, quite, I assure you ! Pray do excuse me for laughing, Mr. Gould ; but really and truly you are *so* funny. Well, your mother left word that you were to entertain me ; and I am sure you feel more like scalping me just now, don't you ?"

"I shall be glad to do any thing in my power," said Oliver stiffly.

"Would you ? Well, I shall be glad to have you ; for it's been a little stupid here alone."

"I fear I shall not be much of an improvement."

"Oh, yes, you will ! You have entertained me ever so much already."

"Indeed !"

"And I'm not at all hard to entertain."

"It appears not."

"There, that was satirical."

"Excuse me, it was not."

"Ironical, then?"

"Neither."

"Oh, well, if it wasn't, never mind! But," continued the young lady seating herself upon the sofa and assuming a labored air of attention, "I'm ready now."

"Ready?"

"To be entertained. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"Never mind taking any trouble, you know."

"I'm not often found in such a predicament —"

"Oh, Mr. Gould!" laughed the merciless young woman, while she clapped her hands softly. "Dreadful, after what you said, too, a few minutes ago about being glad, etc."

"If you will permit me to finish," returned Oliver, with rather a ponderous dignity, "I was about to say, I am not often called upon to entertain young ladies in my own house, especially strangers. I know so little about their tastes, therefore you will have to make allowances. Are you interested?" — his wandering eye fell upon a cabinet at the other end of the room — "in — in — but of course you're not."

"What is it? Perhaps I am."

"Numismatics."

"Numismatics? Ye-es; that is, I don't know: it is something to do with fishes, isn't it?"

"Not quite: excuse me; I should have said coins."

"Oh, certainly! I was very stupid. Yes, I like them very much, — except the battered ones."

"My father made a very good collection, if you would like to see them."

"I should be delighted."

Oliver led the way to the cabinet, followed by his visitor, who took a stealthy look in the glass, and gave her bonnet one or two private pokes, as they passed:

"These," said Oliver, pulling out a drawer, "are all Roman coins. This, for instance, is of the period of Metellus Scipio."

"Yes: he was the absurd creature that jumped into the gulf, wasn't he?"

"No: I think you have in mind Mettus Curtius."

"Perhaps I have: but they both begin with an 'M.' There's two mistakes I've made. Oh, dear, I'm afraid you'll find out I'm not learned!"

"This," continued Oliver gravely, "is a Roman *as*, a small copper coin: the design upon it, you see, is a ship's prow."

"It looks more like a boot-jack, doesn't it?" returned the young lady, stifling a yawn behind Oliver's shoulder.

"It doesn't look much like our ships, at any rate. The modern yacht, I think, is the most graceful vessel that can be imagined. Did you see the regatta the other day?"

"I did not."

"Do you like yachting?"

"No-o, it makes me sick; that is, I don't mind the real, outright, rough weather particularly; but when it bulges up smooth, like — like blanc-mange — Oh, dear, it makes me dizzy now to think of it!"

"This," continued Oliver, with immovable gravity, "is the medal of an Acilius. You see the horses very distinctly, and you will notice they are remarkably spirited. The Roman chariot-racing must have been tremendous."

"I suppose so," returned the visitor demurely, studying her host's profile instead of the coin.

"Did you go to the races last week?"

"I? Mercy! mamma would be scandalized at the very thought of it."

"Why so?"

"Isn't it very immoral and improper?"

"Not in the least."

"Don't they bet and cheat, and all that sort of thing?"

"Hm-m! a little sometimes, perhaps; but you needn't do it yourself."

"You needn't? But if you're a weak person, you're tempted to; so it is a bad thing."

"So, if you're a weak person, you may be tempted to steal spoons."

"There, now, you want to draw me into a discussion; but I shall not let you. I hate discussions; and, besides, here comes mamma to take me off your hands."

In fact, the two elder ladies entered at the moment.

"Ah, Noll, you're at home, then! — My son, Mrs. Houghton. — One of my old school-friends, Noll. — And are you tired out waiting for your mother, my dear?"

"Oh, no! I am having a delightful time, learning all about the coins. Mamma, what is numismatics?"

"There would be no credit in answering, my dear, after the hint you have given me."

"To be sure, so there wouldn't, but I didn't know; and I forgot the name of the man that jumped into the hole, and I have been distinguishing myself generally. Aren't you ashamed of me?"

"I will take you away at once, for fear I shall be," said Mrs. Houghton, laughing; and accordingly, after fifteen minutes spent in leave-taking, the two ladies withdrew.

"Well, Noll, have you lost your heart?" asked Mrs. Gould of her son.

"No; but there's not much left of my patience."

"What! are you not in love with Miss Houghton?"

"Not a bit."

"Why, she is a charming girl."

"Is she? I didn't notice it."

"Well, well, you are a strange boy: she has one of the prettiest faces I ever saw."

"She has need of it: she is an inane little thing, and as pert as you please."

"What, wasn't she interested in the coins? You couldn't expect a girl of eighteen to care very much for those old bits of money."

"She wasn't interested in any thing that I could discover: she rattled off a lot of rubbish about boot-jacks and blanc-mange, and I don't know what. She is a cool little magpie: she sat down, and poked fun at me as though she had known me for a century."

"The trouble is, Noll, you don't know how to get along with girls. I presume you talked boating and horse-racing to her."

"I tried to, but she cares nothing for either."

"I'm glad to hear it: such ignorance wins my admiration and respect."

"It wins nothing from me," retorted the young man, throwing himself into an easy-chair, and opening the evening's paper, "but the fervent hope that I may never set eyes on her again."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ONNHETON.

ALTHOUGH Pike's Court leads out from one of the principal thoroughfares of the city, one might easily walk up and down before it in the ordinary course of business and pleasure for a dozen years, and never suspect its existence. It is, so to speak, a masked battery, that, under cover of the universal roar, pours forth its daily charge of humanity upon the world unsuspected; that is to say, its entrance being not very wide at best, and being furthermore obstructed by fruit-stands and projecting sign-boards, by stray dogs and noisy children, not to mention an occasional job-wagon and a faithful guard of three or four loungers, it may well fail to catch the eye of any but a detective or one of Pike's pilgrims, as the jolly old cobbler called the dwellers in the court.

But, having run the gauntlet of dogs and children, of the old apple-woman on the right, and the sleepy Italian on the left, with his roasted chestnuts and his dangling ear-rings, having once got fairly inside the court, it is by no means an ill-looking place. The houses are old, but not dilapidated; the street is clean of rubbish; the sidewalks look as though they were swept once in a while; and there is altogether an air of decency and quiet all the more grateful, because not at all promised by its entrance; so that Pike's, like many an unfortunate man or woman in whom an ugly face covers a warm heart or a nimble wit, proves an agreeable disappointment.

A cheap restaurant, with some dusty and unwhole-

some-looking pies in the window, a small tobacco-shop, two or three lodging-houses, a paper-box manufactory, a beer-saloon, and a pawnbroker's shop in close proximity, afford elements of sufficient variety to secure the court from monotony ; while the merry old cobbler in his droll little den, which is neither more nor less than a slice cut off from the beer-shop, as he sits nodding and smiling at the passing pilgrims, hammering away at his last from dawn to dusk, soling, heeling, and tapping for the entire court, is a not-to-be-neglected feature in the picture.

But all this varied life and these manifold activities of Pike's are brought to an abrupt standstill by the great brick wall which forms its western boundary, and frustrates its human thirst for extension. Any large, unbroken wall is blank enough ; but there seems a drear, unmitigated blankness about this of Pike's. It yields no feature of variety : it stands forth the great, obtrusive fact in the existence of the court, the dike that shuts up and holds in its restless, seething life, the barrier against which its hopes, longings, yearnings, and ambitions roll and dash in tumultuous waves, only to be thrown back in futile spray and bubbles ; the impassable limit to its progress and development ; and withal its mystery, — for what lies beyond that veil of brick and mortar is not known even to the oldest dweller in the court. There was once, to be sure, a tradition current among the more credulous, of a beautiful garden, with fountains and trees and flowers, and green grass and winding paths, on the other side ; but this, besides being inherently improbable, has long been discarded as founded upon no sufficient authority.

Great was the commotion in Pike's when, many years ago, an audacious new-comer — a Yankee fresh from New England — ventured to affix to the wall the great painted sign which has ever since attracted the attention of visitors to the court, and which, next to the wall itself, is its most conspicuous feature. This

sign, which has pretensions as a work of art, and is regarded as a masterpiece by the pilgrims, gives a touching representation of a well-known parable in which a very florid "Good Samaritan," in bright blue and yellow, is administering relief to a very naked and ghastly-looking sufferer from a bottle with an illegible label, while above and below in huge letters runs the inscription : —

DEPOT OF THE
ONNHETON.

THE LIFE-PROLONGER!

THE GREAT INDIAN REMEDY!

JOY OF THE AFFLICTED!

PANACEA OF THE AGE!

ORDERS FILLED PROMPTLY, AND GOODS DELIVERED IN
ALL PARTS OF THE CITY.

At the bottom of the board, — that there may be no doubt as to the whereabouts of the dépôt, — appears a hand, with an unnaturally long forefinger, pointing straight at the door of the adjoining house. Following the direction of the finger, we see a bright green door, bearing a plate on which is engraved in bold letters the name of "BADGER."

And as that extended forefinger points always to the same spot, day and night, early and late, in fair weather and foul, it pointed, as a matter of course, one crisp Saturday morning in November, 186—, straight at Miss Volumnia Badger, who, at the early hour of six o'clock A.M., was engaged in polishing the plate.

Having finished her task, Miss Badger proceeded to sweep the steps; and then, after taking a look

down the court, went into the house, deposited her broom in a dark entry closet, and proceeded up-stair to the first-story front room where her mother was vigorously getting ready the morning meal.

"Vigorously," we say, for Mrs. Badger seemed to make a prodigious and quite unnecessary bustle in the accomplishment of her peaceful task. She strode about the little room in a very warlike way, stormed the side-board, attacked the chairs, charged at the table, deployed into the kitchen, and generally made the doors and windows rattle.

Miss Badger was evidently accustomed to her mother's manner; for she appeared not to notice it, and busied herself with the care of a large plant in the window. Miss Badger had but one plant,—a huge cactus that nearly filled the little bay-window where it stood. We may say in confidence to the reader that it was an ugly, monstrous plant; but it was none the less the wonder of the court, and the pride and delight of Miss Badger's heart.

She was presently interrupted in her task by a summons from her mother, who, having marched and counter-marched in and out from the kitchen with various smoking dishes, at length banged the coffee-pot down upon the tray, with a force that must have neutralized the effect of the piece of fish-skin which she had just put into it, and cried,—

"V'lumny, ready!"

Mrs. Badger next opened the door, rang a bell violently in the passage, and immediately took her seat at the table. Miss Badger hurriedly wiped her hands upon her apron, went to the sideboard, poured out a wine-glass full of a dark-looking liquor from a bottle closely resembling the one in the hand of the "Good Samaritan" on the wall, and slowly drank it off. She had hardly taken her seat at her mother's right when steps were heard in the passage, and directly after two men entered the room, as like, each

to the other, as two peas, except for the matter of size. They proceeded at once to the sideboard, where each drank a glass of the "Life-Prolonger," and then took their seats at the family-board without a word. The larger of the two placed himself at the foot of the table, and the other, who looked like his brother seen through the wrong end of an opera-glass, opposite Miss Badger.

Both men had pinched features, pallid skins, and narrow sunken chests; they were subdued in voice and manner, with an air of humility which was defeated in its appeal to the sympathies by a look at once sordid and sly. They ate their meal in silence, and with a despatch that might have led one not acquainted with American manners to suppose that they were eating for a wager. The same haste would seem to have presided at their morning toilet; for neither of them had apparently found time to put on his coat, but appeared at the table in not very immaculate shirt-sleeves.

Mrs. Badger, as soon as she had stopped rattling the cups and spoons so that she could make herself heard, asked in a somewhat ironical tone, —

"What's the news this mornin'? Richmond taken yet?"

Mrs. Badger's speech was all the more effective for being in marked contrast to her look and manner. Her voice was neither loud nor high as might have been expected; and the hearer, feeling that this was the result of self-restraint, experienced accordingly a wholesome respect for her probable reserved power. She spoke, moreover, slowly, and at times with a rather ruthless emphasis.

As her remark above given was addressed to nobody in particular, nobody for some time ventured to answer. At length Mr. Peter Badger admitted feebly that he had been out, and read the bulletins, and borrowed the cobbler's paper, and that it was not taken.

"No, nor never will be," said Mrs. Badger, stirring her coffee; "not till the women take hold of it!"

"Yes: send a regiment of petticoats down there, and Lee'd skedaddle pooty quick," said Mr. Badger in a dry, cracked little voice.

"He, he, he!" giggled Mr. Peter.

"Women might not *fight*, Mr. Badger; though if they did I hope they'd make a little better work of it than the men are doin'. Women *would* not fight; there'd be no need of their fightin'; there's no need of anybody's fightin'. War is a barbarity. Women would have brains enough to settle it in some other way."

"Yes," began Mr. Badger, with a hesitating look at his wife, "they'd" —

"Eh?"

"Talk."

Mr. Peter showed symptoms of another giggle.

"They would," retorted Mrs. Badger, throwing back her head, and regarding both men through her gold-bowed spectacles, with a level glance that effectually repressed further sarcasm or merriment. "They'd talk to some purpose: they'd put a stop to all this waste of human life, this draining dry the resources of the country. I tell you," continued Mrs. Badger, with a sweeping gesture that just cleared the coffee-pot, "this war'll put the American nation back twenty years in its development. It is a judgment upon them,—a righteous judgment for their injustice to women; an' they'll see it too. Mark my words, some day they'll see it!"

Mrs. Badger was evidently climaxing, and nobody ventured to interpose.

"Men," she continued with a rising inflection, "are like a lot o' cock'rels in a barnyard; always crowin' an' fightin', an' that's all. Now look at the hens, what are they doin'? Pickin' an' scratchin', raisin' their young, an' tendin' to their business. An' it's

just so all through the animal creation: the chief instinct of the male sex is fight, fight, fightin'; an' I tell you," she concluded, with a formidable use of the forefinger, "the world's gittin' tired of it; it's been tired of it a good while; 'tis time' twas stopped, an' it's goin' to be stopped, an' women are goin' to stop it! I tell you, here an' now, an' you might as well make up your minds to it: the women's day is comin'!"

Mrs. Badger, it may perhaps be unnecessary to explain, belonged to a local female-suffrage organization. Her name was always inserted in the list of vice-presidents at their annual meetings, and her voice was heard not unfrequently from the suffrage platform.

Her family listened to her remarks with the air of those who have heard the same or similar views before. Miss Badger, indeed, who alone appeared quite insensible to the terrors of her mother's elocution, seemed only waiting for an opportunity of changing the subject.

"Been bottlin' this mornin'?" she asked, when her mother at length paused to take breath.

Both men nodded, without raising their eyes.

"Shall I have to mix to-day?"

Peter Badger looked at his brother, who answered as soon as he could clear his mouth, —

"Guess ye might ez well."

"How much you got on hand?"

"'Bout four gallon."

"That won't last till noon. You goin' on the road to-day?" asked Miss Badger, turning to her father.

"Yes."

"How 'bout them testimonials?"

"Got to hev some more right away. Four or five of our old ones are dead; ben dead a good while, some on 'em: we must git some fresh ones for the new circulars."

"How many'll you hev to hev?"

"'Bout a dozen. Make 'em pretty stiff, you know!"

"I understand," said Miss Badger with an experienced air: "you won't give more'n a bottle apiece, I s'pose."

"Thet's as't happens. If it's an editor or parson, ginerally make it three,—comes back in advertisin'."

"V'lumny," said Mrs. Badger, "I think it's 'bout time you give up workin' in the shop. You ain't well, an' it ain't proper work for you."

"I don't object to the work."

"That makes no odds."

"They need me too."

"Well, if your father an' Peter can't run the shop alone, I think it's a pity."

"Father's got to go on the road; an' Uncle Pete can't bottle'n mix too," objected Miss Badger.

"Then they must git a spare hand, that's all: I can't have you down there workin' in the shop all the time, so that settles the question."

Miss Badger made no reply to this ultimatum. The two men hitched uneasily in their chairs, finished their breakfast hastily, wiped their mouths upon their sleeves, rose, and hurried out. Mrs. Badger got up shortly afterwards, and bustled into the kitchen, saying,—

"I'll leave you to 'tend to things here, V'lumny."

Miss Badger made no reply; but silence, with Miss Badger, evidently did not always mean acquiescence; for, directly her mother left the room, she went to a closet in the corner, took out an apron, buttoned it about her waist, tucked up her sleeves, and went down stairs.

Here she passed through a front-room arranged as a salesroom, with showcase and counter, through a passage into a workshop in the rear. Long shelves, covered with empty bottles, other long shelves covered with bottles filled with the Life-Prolonger, and presenting a linear repetition of the word "Onnheton" that made the eyes ache; boxes and bundles of dried

herbs, large tunnels and small tunnels, piles of labels, bottles of gum, boxes of corks, sticks of sealing-wax, knives, scissors, etc., gave this room a very busy air. At one end was a rusty-looking stove, holding a large caldron. In a corner hard by, was a cask of molasses, flanked by a couple of large demijohns. Along one side ran a counter or work-table; and on the other was a desk and stool, with a little locker, for the accountant. Her father was seated at the desk, and her uncle was lighting a fire in the stove, when Miss Badger entered. They did not seem surprised to see her.

"Guess I'll sweep up a little while that gits to burnin'," she said, producing a broom from behind the door. "Did you go collectin' yesterday?" she asked presently, turning to her father, who was making entries from a small book into a larger.

"Ye—es; I went round a little."

"Anybody pay?"

"A few."

"How much d'you take in?"

"Didn't take in a great deal."

Perhaps this was as definite information as Miss Badger desired; at any rate, she seemed content with the answer as she proceeded to wipe out the steaming caldron, and fill it with fresh water.

"There!" she said, approaching her uncle, "I'll seal an' label while that's heatin', an' you can go on bottlin'. We'll hev to push this right along, for I can only help you this mornin'."

"Goin' out this afternoon?" asked her father quickly.

"Yes."

"Goin' to see that lawyer?"

"Dunno: I may."

"Hope ye ain't goin' to sign no papers, V'lumny," said Peter, looking up suspiciously.

"*She* can't sign papers: you an' I'll have to do all that," interposed Mr. Badger. "What's he done so far, anyway?"

"Dunno ez he's done any thing."

"Well, now, V'lumny, look out ; keep away from that feller ; don't go near him any oftener'n you can help. Mind you, he'll charge fer every time ye go : if he wants you for any thing he'll send fast enough."

Miss Badger offered no objection to this advice ; in fact, made no reply whatever. Evidently her silence was a little unsatisfactory to her father ; for he cast a searching, sidelong glance at her as she went swiftly on with her work of pasting the labels on a row of bottles before her. He must have been very astute if he derived any intelligence from her blank, placid face.

"Come, Pete," he said, taking his hat : "you'll have to come and help me load."

The brothers went out together, and left Miss Badger at work. She waited until their footsteps died away down the passage, when she rose, went to the desk, perched herself upon the high stool, and tried the door of the locker. It was fast. Miss Badger, apparently not surprised at this, produced a key from her pocket, opened the door, took out the book in which her father had been writing, and rapidly examined the entries. Her uncle's returning step, presently heard in the entry, caused her quickly to replace the book, and return to her work.

A steam now arose from the caldron, and a seething noise showed it to be upon the point of boiling ; whereupon Miss Badger proceeded to weigh out carefully, with a pair of balances, various parcels of herbs, which she put in a strainer, and dropped into the caldron. She added, further, a dozen or more sticks of licorice, divers barks and roots, and four full quarts of molasses from the cask in the corner.

Meanwhile the door opened suddenly, and Mrs. Badger appeared on the threshold. She stood motionless for several minutes, regarding her daughter, — who exhibited not the least consciousness of her presence, — and retired without a word.

Miss Badger heard the bang of the door with unmoved face, as, intent upon her work, she stirred the smoking mixture, tasting it critically from time to time with her big wooden spoon. At length she said, —

"You can go right on with your bottlin', Uncle Pete. This is done, an' it will be cold in an hour."

She then quickly brought forth a large tub, fixed it upon a stout stool, covered it with a flannel strainer, and dipped into it the contents of the caldron. In fifteen minutes the mixture was all strained, the caldron rinsed and cleaned, and Miss Badger's hands carefully dried upon her apron. She then took a large measure, and, filling it from one of the demijohns with something that smelt suspiciously like "Old Bourbon," poured that into the tub, and gave the whole a thorough stirring. She next dipped out about a gallon of the mixture into a wooden bucket, added to it a second and larger infusion from the demijohn, stirred it, tasted it, and at length, lifting it upon the table, said, —

"This is for the testimonials, Uncle Pete ; an' you'd better do them first."

"Ain't you goin' to help ?"

"No. I guess not."

"Why not ?"

"Mother wants me."

"Aint goin' out, be ye ?"

"Dunno."

"Ain't goin' to that lawyer's, I hope."

"Can't say exactly."

"Yer father told you not to."

"Father ain't always the best judge."

"Wall, I think you'd better drop it."

"Drop what ?"

"The whole thing : it's resky ; it's mighty uncertain 'bout your gittin' any thing, an' it'll be sure to cost like the devil, whether you do or not."

"P'r'aps the lawyer won't charge if he don't git any thing."

"An' if he does, he'll take half of it."

"P'r'aps he won't."

"P'r'aps he won't," retorted the uncle irritably. "You know well enough he will."

"Well, supposin' he does?"

"Supposin' he does," repeated Mr. Peter Badger, whose method of argument was to repeat in a scornful tone the suggestion of his opponent. "Why, then we shall be jeremy-diddled out of half we're worth, and lose all our trouble into the bargain."

"I don't see as you're takin' any extry trouble."

"Well, you be on my account ; an' it's my money — half of it — that'll hev to pay the fiddler."

"I sh'd think you'd a good deal rather have half than nothin'."

"If it belongs to us, we'll git it some time, an' I don't want to be swindled out of my share by any shark of a lawyer."

"Very well, then you needn't," said Miss Badger placidly, approaching the door.

"Hold on," interposed Peter nervously : "what you goin' to do?"

"Father'n' I can do what we like now."

"Oh, well ! I don't mean to say that if any thing's goin' on to git hold of the money, that I want to back out eggsactly."

"What do you mean to say?"

"I say, don't be in a hurry ; take time ; and, above all, keep away from that lawyer."

Miss Badger made no reply, but, leaving her uncle muttering out his unfinished remonstrances to the bottle he was filling, proceeded up-stairs, where she found her mother, with her head wrapped in a towel, sweeping the living-room. Mrs. Badger leaned upon the broomstick, and regarded her daughter for a full minute before speaking.

"Well; got through?"

"Yes. I thought I'd leave uncle Pete to finish"—

"Oh, you did!"

"An' come up an' help you."

"You don't say! Hope you didn't put yourself out."

"I didn't want you to do it all yourself," returned Miss Badger submissively.

"No, you're tender of me."

Miss Badger took off her apron, got a brush from the closet, and set about dusting the room.

"You're a filial an' devoted an' obedient offspring," continued Mrs. Badger, resuming her sweeping.

Miss Badger offered no protest to her mother's withering remarks, but pursued her task with a composed resignation of countenance quite indescribable.

"You're most too good to live!" continued Mrs. Badger, as, having driven the dust before her into one corner of the room, she now sent it rattling and flying into the kitchen, with a final vigorous stroke of the broom.

Miss Badger went on with her work in unbroken silence until she was through; she then put the brush away, shut the closet-door, and prepared to leave the room.

"Well, what now?"

"I thought I should go out a little while."

"Oh! what you goin' out for?"

"I thought I'd like to do a little shoppin'."

"Oh! ain't goin' near that lawyer, I s'pose?"

"Haven't quite made up my mind."

"Well, I advise you to make it up at once, and keep away from him. When he wants you he'll send for you."

"There ain't any thing I can git for you, I s'pose?"

"You can git me a little Christian forbearance, if you can find any. I need a good deal more'n I've got, to git along in this family."

In fifteen minutes more Miss Badger, arrayed in a brown beaver bonnet and sky-blue veil, passed out of Pike's Court between the admiring apple-woman and the chestnut-roaster. In thirty minutes more she was ushered into the private consulting-room of Nicholas Ferrette, Esq.

CHAPTER V.

ATTORNEY AND CLIENT.

MR. FERRETTE looked up with a wide distension of his moustache at sight of his client. He rose quickly, and placed a chair; he shook hands cordially; and what with the velvetiness of his eyes and skin, what with his fine clothes and abundant jewelry, his soft, smooth hands and low voice, there was something sumptuous and soothing and confidence-inspiring about him, that might have affected a young woman less perfectly poised than Miss Badger.

"I thought I'd just step in a minute as I was passin'," she began in a damp, cool way.

"Yes, certainly; always glad to see you."

"I didn't know but you might hev some news for me."

"Well, no; no great news as yet. Hardly time, you see."

"Oh! well, I didn't know."

"Law's a slow mill," said Mr. Ferrette jocosely, "but it's pretty sure."

"I s'pose so," coincided Miss Badger feebly.

"I wrote to that woman after you went, the other day."

"Oh, you did!"

The pupils of Miss Badger's eyes began to darken, and she leaned her elbow upon the desk with an appearance of interest.

"Yes: I'll read you the letter if you'd like."

"Thank you."

Miss Badger listened to the letter with close attention, but made no remark upon it.

"How's that?" asked Mr. Ferrette confidently.

"I s'pose it's all right."

"It's merely a formal, general demand to open proceedings, you understand," explained Mr. Ferrette, trying to read his client's face.

"'T seems to me you ought to have heard by this."

"Oh, no! not yet. They will take their time about an answer. Why, you see," said Mr. Ferrette, leaning towards his client, and lowering his voice to the confidential pitch, "this will stir them up immensely: it'll prove a regular firebrand. She'll take it to her lawyer, and he'll need time to look it up a little. Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Ferrette, rubbing his hands confidently, "he'll need a good deal of time to look it up, I guess. Oh, yes! it may be a week or more yet before we get an answer."

"Then you think they'll go to law about it?"

"Impossible to say."

"If they do, 'twill cost a great deal, I s'pose."

"It'll cost something, of course; but then if you win you'll have plenty to pay with."

"Are you sure we *shall* win?"

"We are, strictly speaking, *sure* of nothing."

"I thought, when anybody had the law on their side, they were sure."

"Humph! not exactly; judges don't always see the law as we'd like to have 'em."

"Don't see what the laws are good for, then."

"But I don't mind telling you, strictly between ourselves," pursued the attorney with a return of his confidential manner, "that I have been looking into this case since I saw you, and I have not the slightest doubt about it."

"I have been thinkin'," said Miss Badger with a pre-occupied air, as though she had not heard the last remark, "that p'r'aps I'd better go and see Miss Gould."

"What! this woman?"

"Yes."

"No, no!" cried Mr. Ferrette, his look changing in a minute. "Don't do that on any account! Don't go near her, unless you want to spoil your case."

"Why, p'raps I could get her answer, and see what she means to do."

"We shall find that out fast enough," returned Mr. Ferrette, studying his client with a suspicious look. "If she don't answer in a proper time, I shall sue her."

"It might save a good deal of expense," persisted Miss Badger.

"Not at all, not at all!" exclaimed Mr. Ferrette, his scalp moving forward, and his face settling into a sullen scowl. "It would be a fatal mistake; 'twould spoil our case; they'd think we weren't sure of our ground. Don't you ever do such a thing as that; and don't you move a finger in the matter without consulting me," he concluded with an emphasis that verged closely upon a menace.

Miss Badger viewed her counsel's sudden vehemence with unruffled equanimity; but made no further objection, and said, on taking her leave, she supposed he'd send her word when he had any thing to say.

Mr. Ferrette opened the door for her to go, and followed her down the passage, with a sinister glance.

"Another hell-broth brewing," whispered the junior to the senior.

CHAPTER VI.

A BUSINESS EVENING.

"**N**OW, Noll," says Mrs. Gould, entering the library one evening just after dinner, carrying in her hand a small red-leather trunk, "I want you to give this evening to me. It is time we came to an understanding about your affairs."

Noll quietly lays aside his newspaper, and regards his mother gravely as she unlocks the trunk, and asorts its contents. His face, in its serious aspect, has a certain largeness of expression in excellent keeping with the sweep of his long limbs. The composed air with which he awaits a discussion so important and interesting to him is noteworthy.

"Come, my son," said his mother, at length putting on her eye-glass, "draw up your chair, and give me your attention."

"Am I expected to swallow and digest the contents of that box at one sitting?"

"I don't know: we shall see what stomach you have for business. Now," she continued, arranging her papers, "I shall, no doubt, tell you some things that you know already; but that cannot be helped. I must follow a certain order, so that I can keep every thing clear in my own mind, and give you a connected statement."

"All right: take your own way."

"Your father," resumed Mrs. Gould, taking off her eye-glass for a preliminary explanation, "had, as you have been told, a natural talent for affairs. But he gained money better than he kept it. The last five

years of his life he made many unfortunate ventures ; and the result of the settlement of his estate was a great surprise to me, as to everybody else. I have no doubt that it was his continual brooding over these losses that aggravated his disease, and hastened his end. His will, as you know, was made several years before his death ; and there was accordingly quite a discrepancy between the amount of the assets and the provisions in the will."

Oliver bowed, as though the story thus far was familiar to him.

" Here is a copy of the will," continued his mother, taking a paper from the trunk, and laying it upon the table, " which I will not now stop to read. By it, as you know, I was made executrix, and gave my bond for a large amount accordingly. Of course, the principal part of the estate was divided between you and me. He left me, besides his life-insurance, — twenty thousand dollars, — and our country house, with all its furniture, books, and pictures, a considerable bequest in money, which, of course, I never received. All this you understand was to be in lieu of dower, if I should so elect. I did so elect, in order that you might have your share free of any right or claim of mine."

Oliver bowed again with respectful attention.

" Furthermore," continued his mother, " the will provided for the payment of some half a dozen legacies, which, of course, for want of money, were never paid ; after which all the rest of the estate, comprising our town-house and 'Damen's Row,' was left to you. The residuary clause was designed to include a considerable sum of money : in fact it included none. Such, then, was the state of things when the estate came into my hands. It took what little ready money there was to pay the outstanding debts ; and, as there was nothing left to pay the legacies, they were never paid. For myself, I may say in passing, that I have managed by strict economy to make both ends meet, and live upon

the interest of my twenty thousand dollars, which I succeeded in investing very profitably. I have kept the homestead in repair and free from incumbrances, and I have besides a little penny laid by for a rainy day."

"Good!" cried Oliver approvingly.

"And now, as to your affairs, I will premise that full power was given me by the will to sell or mortgage any part of the estate as I might think fit. Damen's always seemed to me a good investment, and I decided to let that alone. I sold the town-house, however, and applied the proceeds to the improvement of the 'Row,' which sadly needed it. Furthermore, I have applied the yearly income derived from that property, beyond what was necessary for your liberal maintenance and education, to the paying-off the mortgage your father put upon it a few months before he died. This I have at length accomplished, and the estate now stands clear in your name. It is, moreover, in excellent repair, and yields a large yearly rental. Altogether, I cannot see how I could have managed the estate better in your interest than I have done."

"Nor I," said Noll admiringly.

"These," continued Mrs. Gould, taking up the different papers, as she enumerated them, "are the leases of the various tenants now occupying the stores in the 'Row:' they have all proved thus far responsible parties. These are the policies of insurance. These are the rent-receipts. These are tax-receipts; these are receipts for repairs. These are title-deeds, satisfied mortgages, etc. This is your bank-book, showing a handsome balance in your favor. This large book contains an exact statement of all my accounts connected with the 'Row,' in which every thing is brought down to date; and I hope you will continue to keep it as carefully and as neatly as I have done."

"Bravo," said Oliver, taking the book, and turning

the leaves curiously : "you ought to be director of a bank, or president of a railroad, Queeny, with your head for business."

"Very good : now I want you to prove that you have a head for business by keeping your affairs as well as I have done."

"The cheapest thing for me will be to hire you."

"No : the cheapest thing for you is to do it yourself, — is to learn to manage your own affairs."

"Learn ! my dear mamma, a man knows all this by instinct. He doesn't have to learn. He takes to it as a duck does to water."

"Yes ; and oftentimes gets no deeper into it than a duck does into water ; that is, just floats upon the surface. A man that knows any thing worth knowing, my son, has to learn. You will have to learn. You will make a good many mistakes ; but you may avoid a good many more by taking advantage of my experience."

"Very well," returned Oliver, still examining the book : "I will be accountant, and you shall be confidential clerk. I will keep the books, and you shall look after the investments."

"There will be no question of investments ; that is precisely what I want to impress upon you. Your property is already invested. If you leave it alone you will be free from anxiety, and sure of a handsome income."

A servant entered at this moment, and spoke in an undertone to Mrs. Gould.

"A lady to see me," said the latter : "what is her name ?"

"She did not give it, ma'am : she says you do not know her."

"What does she want ?"

"She wants to see you on important business, she says."

"Oh, well ! show her up here, then."

"Pooh!" growled Oliver, taking up his newspaper, "send her away, and look out she doesn't pocket the mantle-ornaments!"

The servant retired, and in two minutes more a brown beaver bonnet wound around with a sky-blue veil crossed the threshold.

"Is this *Miss* Gould?"

"I am *Mrs.* Gould."

"Oh, yes! well, you're the one," returned the stranger, seating herself without waiting for an invitation, and gazing about curiously, as she took breath, — a little overcome, evidently, at the elegance of the room. "I b'lieve you got a letter from our lawyer," she continued at length, fixing her eyes with intense interest upon Mrs. Gould.

"May I trouble you to explain, madam, who you are, and what you mean by your lawyer?"

Many people of far more apparent character than Miss Badger would have been discomfited by Mrs. Gould's manner. Miss Badger, however, behaved with surprising tranquillity. She produced a small pocket-book, and, handing a card to Mrs. Gould, said, —

"That is my name. I am 'tendin' to the business 'cause father and uncle Pete are not in very good health, an' they're sort o' nervous, an' mother never wants to hev nothin' to do with law-business."

"Am I to understand that it was you who instigated a letter I have recently received from a person calling himself" —

Mrs. Gould paused to adjust her eye-glass, and turn over some papers in her writing-desk.

"Mr. Ferrette?" suggested Miss Badger.

"Ferrette, yes: I ask if it was you," continued Mrs. Gould, removing her glass, and fixing her clear, unflinching eyes upon her visitor, "who authorized that letter?"

"Yes: I told him to write it," answered Miss Badger with entire composure.

"Are you aware that that letter is an illegal attempt to extort money, which would subject you to a criminal prosecution?"

"Well, no; I don't know's I am," returned Miss Badger, a little thrown from her centre by this startling speech.

"Let me advise you, then, young woman, before resorting to such very extraordinary measures, in the future to consult some person of sufficient age and discretion. And by all means keep out of the hands of unscrupulous men, who, under the guise of an honorable profession, are ready to turn your ignorance to their own account."

The pupils of Miss Badger's eyes began to dilate, and she was, for the moment, seemingly quite overpowered by the vigor of Mrs. Gould's words and manner.

"If I had not treated that letter," continued the latter lady, "with the contempt it deserves, I might have caused you very serious trouble; and I am prolonging this interview chiefly to warn you that I shall not be so considerate in the future. That is all I wish to say or hear upon the subject, and I will not detain you any longer."

"You ain't detainin' me: I ain't in any pertickler hurry, and"—

"You constrain me to inform you, then, that your presence in my house is an intrusion," said Mrs. Gould emphatically.

"Well, I shouldn't 'a' come a-visitin': I come to see you on business."

"If it relates to this I decline to hear it."

"I'm sorry," continued Miss Badger, in the thinnest and flattest of all possible voices, "that you should be so excited; but I s'pose you want to do what's right."

This criticism of her manner was received by Mrs. Gould with silent disdain as she steadily regarded the speaker.

"I never heard of any law before that made it wrong to ask for money that's due you; but I s'pose you know."

"I have told you that I decline to discuss this matter."

"Yes: well, I came here to say 'bout that letter, that it wasn't jest the kind of a letter I wanted wrote. I don't want to go to law about it if I can help it."

Perhaps Mrs. Gould was conscious that no word could have added to the effect of her look and attitude, for she made no answer.

"What I wanted to say was somethin' like this," pursued Miss Badger: "that, if we go to law about it, it will cost a dreadful lot of money, an' it would be a great pity to waste it if we could help it. It would only go to the lawyers. Now, I'm willin' to do any thin' that's fair, an' my folks'll do jest what I say."

Mrs. Gould gave no sign that she had heard these words: she only regarded the speaker with the same fixed look.

"I don't want to trouble you, I'm sure," continued Miss Badger, rising, and plainly beginning to succumb to the indescribable contempt of her adversary's manner; "but I came up to say that I am willin' to take a little less than is lawfully comin' to us, for the sake of settlin' it up peaceably."

Miss Badger moved a few paces towards the door, and stood for several moments anxiously regarding the inflexible face of the mistress of the house.

"If you decide," she concluded, turning as she reached the door, "that you'd ruther settle than go to law, you can send word to me instead of the lawyer."

She paused again, for a possible show of relenting.

"My address is, 'Dépôt of the Onnheton, No. 10 Pike's Court.' Good-night!"

The door opened and shut, and Miss Badger was gone.

Mrs. Gould remained sitting in the same attitude, regarding the door, until she was aroused by a burst of laughter from her son, who was rolling about on the sofa in a paroxysm of delight.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, catching his breath, "she is delicious: she is a jewel of the first water. Such icy, persistent, hardy impudence—it was a perfect treat! You routed her at last, old lady, but not until she had told her story, and got ready to go. I really began to tremble for you."

"Noll, don't be a simpleton!" said Mrs. Gould impatiently, as she rose and left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

HOME GOSSIP.

SINCE her husband's death, Mrs. Gould had depended largely for whatever advice and assistance she needed in her affairs, upon his youngest brother Richard, who, at the breaking-out of the war, had sought and obtained a command in the Union army. As Mrs. Gould kept him fully posted about home affairs, we need make no apology for introducing here one of her letters which throws light upon several points pertinent to our narrative.

DEAR DICK,— When will you get through with this weary war, and come home? I try not to be anxious about you; but your letters are so irregular, and they come at such long intervals, that I sometimes get uneasy in spite of myself. But again I imagine you storming redoubts, or digging intrenchments, or in the thick of some other war-like business, and so excuse you.

Meantime, I hope you are prudent. Look out for chills and rheumatism, have plenty of warm flannels on hand, keep your spirit-flask filled, drink no more water than you can help, and stop smoking.

So much for old-womanism. You will laugh at it, I know; but it's the part of my years and my petticoats to lecture you. I do my duty, and hereby wash my hands of all responsibility if you come home with a broken-down constitution.

Of course you will be glad to hear that I miss you immensely, more and more every day. Noll is of no good as a counsellor. He does not understand yet how any one ever needs advice or solace. Poor boy! that will arrive later. I am in no hurry to offer him sour apples to bite. You are wondering now on what score I want counsel or comfort. Why, nothing in particular, but a thousand and one bits and scraps of things in general that are altogether not worth the ink that it would take to put them down here. The fact is, I am so used to having you to grumble with, that, now I am cut off from that

luxury, I find it a great deprivation. All this will prove the finest and sweetest revenge to you, who are forever saying that I take nobody's advice but my own.

We are at last very comfortably settled. I think I shall like this house as well as any city house. I have been so long used to all the light and air I want, that I sometimes feel a little sense of strangulation on coming home to this place where I have no feeling of privacy, and often catch myself, after I have climbed into my box, and shut the lid, walking about on tiptoe, and speaking in a whisper.

But I shall be content to put up with these trifles, if I accomplish my object in getting Noll started, and pushing him on. As I told you in my last, he has decided to go into business. He has chosen the iron-trade, and I am perfectly satisfied. I doubt if he would have made a successful professional man; and, indeed, if I have any prejudices at all in the matter, they are all in favor of trade.

I am glad of the chance thus afforded me of emphasizing my scorn for the cant so much in vogue in this country and England, which affects to patronize tradesfolk. In Heaven's name, who are tradesfolk? We are a nation of shopkeepers, and so is England. Trade is our glory and prosperity, without which we are every thing or nothing. And, although neither my own father nor grandfather got their living by buying and selling, I hold that a man can run as great a career, can in every thing avail as much towards the well-being of his kind, can make as profound an impression upon his age, in trade, as in the army, in statescraft, or in any of the so-called learned professions, — and do it as nobly too, as largely, and as honorably; and I would hail the opportunity of personally meeting and withering with my contempt the stupidity and vulgarity that leads any man or woman, high or low, to make such a distinction.

You will say, as usual, that I am on a crusade. And so I am. My lance is always in rest against snobbishness in every form. It is the taint of our civilization that will not out, despite all our religion, our charity, our thought and refinement. It is the broad, thick stream of mingled vulgarity, vanity, and idiocy, that rolls its blackening current through society from the palace to the hovel. There seem born not more than a score or two of men and women in every generation that are free from it, — hearts and minds too broad and big and simple to stoop to it.

But where am I getting to? I was talking of Noll. Thank God, no such poison has ever yet entered his system. He takes hold of his new business fairly, keeps his hours, and does his work. I have not yet been able to arouse in him any ambition or enthusiasm: perhaps it is too soon to expect it. I can be patient, as you know. I give him loose rein, and he goes his

own gait, and sings his roundelay. He is as giddy and careless as ever,—indeed, more so; for he has picked up some crony in your place, who, I opine, is by no means a model of all the virtues.

But I am not going to croak about him. I am content to bide my time. I have much to be thankful for with regard to him. Chief and foremost is, that he was not born a girl.

Which reminds me that my old school friend Jane Willis—now Mrs. Houghton—has been to see me. You remember her. She is the same easy-going, luxury-loving creature as ever, with plenty of wits, but not energy enough to run in out of the rain, while, for equanimity, a bomb-shell would not move her. It is good to meet such a temperament in this hurly-burly town, now and then, by way of a rest.

Moreover, her only child and daughter is a beauty, and, more than that, a lovely girl. I have seen much of her the past few weeks, and I have been studying her attentively. She is little more than a child yet, being only eighteen years old. She has a good temper, good manners, and a sound constitution; there are no fits or lunacy in the family on either side, that I can discover; she is well educated and well bred; she has, or will have, an abundant fortune; and so I do not see why she will not do very well for Noll.

By very well I mean excellently. Unfortunately, however, that silly boy will not condescend to cast an eye upon her. Of course I know better than to make any talk about it, or commend her over-highly; and, indeed, it is a little early yet to expect to see my plan work. "Plan"—why, I have no plan, of course. It would be absurd to be so hasty. The idea has simply come into my mind. It seems good, as things look now; for, with Noll's temperament, it will be better for him to settle early in life, and with his ample means there will be nothing to hinder.

But I had nearly forgotten to tell you that some saucy pettifogger has written me a letter demanding that I pay over to him, at this late day forsooth, the modest sum of sixty thousand dollars, and I know not how much more interest, on behalf of those wretched Badgers. Of course you will laugh; and so did I, after a moment's indignation at such a bare-faced attempt at extortion.

On the heels of the letter came one of the Badger brood in person,—a young woman who nobly maintains the traditions of the family. For calm, immovable assurance, I do not remember to have met her equal. She came to see what I could be bought for, and told me with refreshing candor, that, the other members of her family being indisposed or incapable of undertaking 'the business,' as she called it, she had undertaken it herself. Noll was vastly delighted at the interview between us.

I treated her summarily, as you may suppose ; but, despite her cavalier reception, she deliberately discharged herself of her errand, and retreated in good order.

Write me as often as possible ; but, better yet, finish up the war, and come home.

Your affectionate sister,

ANNE.

CHAPTER VIII.

OTHER PILGRIMS.

THE east grows pale ; night flies before the coming day ; and throughout the great city all the wonderful and complicated machinery begins to move. The little wheels buzz, the larger wheels whirr ; the great mighty wheels go, slowly at first, and, anon, fast and faster, rolling, crashing, and thundering on their rounds ; and the din and roar and tumult of another day begin.

Buzz ! whirr ! crash ! roar ! The tumult echoes through Pike's Court ; and, anon, the pilgrims arise, put on their harness, and go moving up and down on their pilgrimage.

And you may be sure that the wheels are buzzing and whirring fast enough over at the "Dépôt of the Onnheton ;" and that, whether she is "mixin'," or "tendin' to the cactus," Miss Badger is in the thick of it.

But we have other acquaintances in the court beside Miss Badger. Farther down, on the opposite side, next door to the cobbler, and up four flights of rather rickety stairs, in a small back room, the wheels have awakened Mr. Joe Piverton, senior clerk of Nicholas Ferrette, Esq. ; and that young gentleman is hovering over a small stove, engaged in the useful but much-neglected art of cooking.

The light from the opposite window falls full upon Mr. Piverton, and shows the three deep lateral wrinkles in his forehead, caused by constantly lifting his eyebrows when he talks ; shows that the bony structure of his face is obtrusively apparent, that his nose is what is

flippantly called a pug, that his mouth is rather large, and his eyes are rather small, and that his flaxen hair curls tightly all over his very round head. Altogether we need hardly say Mr. Piverton does not resemble Apollo or any other known type of masculine beauty ; but there is, nevertheless, a certain frank, honest look in his blue eyes, and certain benevolent lines about his mouth, which make us forget that he is not handsome ; while the neatness of the room, and his own thread-bare dress, rather prepossess us in his favor.

Mr. Piverton is busy, broiling a very small but nice-looking piece of beefsteak. He turns it over and over very deftly, until it is cooked to perfection,—rare in the middle and brown on the outside ; puts it upon a plate which he has warming on the hearth, seasons it with butter, pepper, and salt, and covers it quickly with another plate to keep hot ; while he proceeds to toast a couple of slices of bread, which he also butters and cuts across the middle. He then pours out a cup of fragrant chocolate from a little tin pot on the stove, arranges all his dishes upon a tray covered with a dainty white cloth, adds a fine large orange from the pantry in the corner, and at length carries the tray and its contents through a little connecting passage into the front room.

Here the same scrupulous neatness prevails as in the kitchen. Despite the meanness of the furniture, various dainty trifles disposed here and there about the room give it almost an elegant air ; while the morning sun, streaming through the wide dormer window, which is filled with plants, and draped with a bit of old muslin, makes it bright and cheerful.

A young woman of one or two and twenty, with a pale face and an invalid air, reclines in a large easy-chair. Her resemblance to Mr. Joe Piverton at once indicates the kinship between them.

“What on earth have you been doing, Joe? I

thought you were never coming," she said peevishly, as he entered.

"Yes, I'm a little behindhand this morning. The fire was slow," he returned cheerfully, as he proceeded to set out a small table near his sister's chair.

"Oh, don't put it there, right in the sun!"

"Why, Liz, old girl, I thought 'twould be more cheerful."

"It'll be cheerful enough anywhere if I ever get it."

"Well, I *am* a slow-poke, and that's a fact; but I hope it'll be good, at any rate."

"You've burnt the toast, to begin with!" she exclaimed, examining the contents of the tray critically.

"So there is, I declare, a touch of black on the crust: I'll cut it off."

"Never mind, oh, never mind!" she exclaimed with a deep sigh of resignation; "only let me have it before it's stone cold; but I s'pose it's that already."

"If it is, we'll have some more," said Joe, as he went to the window, fumbled among the plants, and presently returned with a spray of heliotrope and a geranium-leaf, which he held to his sister's nose.

"There! take a sniff o' that. That up to snuff, eh? Ha, ha! that's a joke. Why don't you laugh?"

The sister took the flower without the formality of an acknowledgment, and put it carelessly in her button-hole; while the brother stood by, watching, with an air of quiet delight, her evident enjoyment of the breakfast which she was too hungry, perhaps, to commend.

"And how are we this morning, anyway? Feeling like a fighting-cock?"

"Why will you persist in asking me that question, when you know I'm not any better, and I can never be any better?"

"Pooh, pooh, my dear! you're getting to be a regular banger: you'll be going out day's washing in three

months from now. Ha, ha ! wouldn't you make the suds fly ? ”

“ Don't, Joe, stand there staring at me : go and cook your own steak, and eat it. ”

“ Aha ! so I will. It might spoil a-keeping, if I don't hurry. There ! ” he continued, putting a small bell upon the tray, “ there's the tinkler. If you run aground for any thing, summon the minion. So long ! ”

With this, Joe returned to the kitchen, and proceeded to set out his own breakfast, — a couple of baked potatoes, a bowl of milk, and a plate of Boston crackers. He seated himself at the table, and took up the spoon, then stopped, bit his nails, looked up at the clock, and hesitated. At length he got up, went softly to the door, opened it, tiptoed his way down-stairs, and knocked at the front door on the floor below. A buxom-looking Irishwoman, with a beery breath and a slatternly air, answered the knock ; and, as she opened the door, disclosed a room behind her in much disorder, with several small children running about.

“ Good-morning, Mrs. Flannigan. ”

“ The same to ye, Mr. Pivleton. ”

“ Can I borrow the baby this morning ? ”

“ 'Deed an' ye can do that same, sir-r, an' I'll be glad to be aised of him. ”

She turned back, and captured from a corner of the floor the fattest and dirtiest of babies, whom she presently fetched forth, smoothing down his uncombed hair as she handed him over to Joe.

“ There he is, the young thafe o' the wur-rld ; he's the plague o' me loife, so he is ; an' how's the sither these days, Misther Pivleton ? ”

“ Better, much better, thank you. ”

“ Ah-h, that's the toime o' day for yez ! she'll soon be out o' that, now ! ”

“ Thank you : I hope so. Come along, Buster ! ” cried Joe, as he took the baby, and carried it at arm's-length up-stairs, where he put it down in a chair, and

softly shut the door. He then got some soap and water, and washed its hands and face thoroughly, — a process to which the baby submitted with stolid good-nature. Then, opening a drawer in the kitchen-table, Joe produced a clean calico apron, which he put on the baby, thus entirely covering up its own soiled attire.

Buster did great credit to the labor bestowed upon him: he now appeared a very good-looking child. Joe was so well pleased with the change that he seized him, tossed him in the air, and went through various other gymnastics, evidently to the great delight of the baby, who crowed and laughed, and waved his chubby arms in a state of high infantile excitement.

Joe next got a starch-box from the pantry, put it in an arm-chair, perched Buster upon it, drew him up to the table, and gave him a plate full of potatoes mashed in milk, which, in spite of all precept and example, Buster would persist in eating with his dimpled fists instead of the spoon. Joe was highly delighted at this performance, and laughed aloud; but Buster regarded him with grave imperturbability, and steadily continued his meal, responding to Joe's constant efforts at conversation with various inarticulate sounds, which, however, proved highly satisfactory to his host.

But their breakfast was presently interrupted by a sharp peal from the other room.

"Pull down that blind a little, Joe, and just move my chair out of the sun, won't you?"

"Certainly. How go the rations?"

"Oh, well enough! but I haven't any appetite."

"I'm sorry; but, as soon as you get to going out, we'll fix all that."

"Do tell me what is all that noise out in the kitchen?"

"Noise!" repeated Joe, with an affectation of innocence.

"Yes: you haven't got that dirty baby again, have you?"

"I? why, — that is — I had a little extra milk, and" —

"How can you do it! you know how I dislike that nasty child: he always turns my stomach."

"But my dear Liz, it isn't Buster's fault, you know."

"It's his mother's fault, and it amounts to the same. She's a dirty woman, and she ought to be ashamed of herself; but that doesn't make the baby any cleaner."

"But you'd really be astonished to see how well he looks: I've scrubbed him up."

"Scrubbed! You'd have to boil him before I could touch him."

"And I have bought a ready-made pinafore which I keep to put on him."

"Yes: you cover up the dirt."

"But it's great fun to have somebody at the table to take a share of my breakfast: Buster isn't squeamish, and he has always a good appetite."

"Never fear; and you'll make him sick feeding him on beefsteak, and all sorts of rich unwholesome food, — a child that hasn't his teeth yet."

"Oh, no! I eat all the rich unwholesome food myself: I only give him potatoes and milk."

"Well, I haven't strength to argue, and you are always arguing. I wish you wouldn't have him, and that's all. I can't bear to have you come near me after you have handled him."

"There, there! don't go and get in a fumigation about it: I'll take him right home, and it's time I was going anyway. What'll we have for dinner to-day?"

"I don't know: that baby has bothered me so I can't think of any thing."

"Never mind, my dear, leave it to me. Now I'll

wheel up to the big table, so ; there are your books and knitting ; then I'll take away these breakfast-dishes, and you'll be ready to receive the queen. Keep a stiff upper lip now. Dinner'll be here at one o'clock."

"Come home early."

"Oh, yes ! as soon as the mill stops ; which will be as soon as N. F. gets tired grinding : so now, as the auctioneers say, my dear, going, going, gone !"

With the last word Joe shut the door softly, and hurried back to the kitchen, where Buster, left to his own devices, had already crawled upon the table, and, in his investigations, upset the milk ; and was contentedly sitting in a pool of it, eating a cracker which he held out to Joe with a triumphant air, showing the marks of his two little teeth.

But the latter had no time to trifle : with an anxious glance at the clock, he made haste to take off and put away the apron, give Buster a final toss in the air before restoring him to his beery mamma, and hasten away to set the wheels going in the law-chambers of Nicholas Ferrette, Esq., before that gentleman arrived.

The alert junior was there before him, indulging in a heel-and-toe by himself, in the back-office.

"Hello, Popsy ! seen the calendar ?"

"Ay, ay !"

"What's on ?"

"Tracy motions in supreme chambers, 'Ball *agst.* Batt' in Part I. superior ; 'Reed *agst.* Flag' in Part II. ; and 'Dunn *agst.* Gouge,' set down p'rempt'ry for this mornin'."

"What's the time now ?"

"Ten minutes of."

"Look alive, then : get the papers while I write a consent to have the motions put over ; if I can get hold of 'the other side' before the calendar's called p'r'aps I can do it."

"What you goin' to do with the jury cases?"

"Dunno; put 'em over the term if I can; must attend to these motions first; then I'll cut up-stairs and skirmish: you'll have to 'tend to Dunn *agst.* Gouge."

"What if they press it? sure to do it: judge said last time he wouldn't have any more trifling, and we'd have to go on."

"D' you tell 'Old Nick'?"

"Tell him! Yes; an' put it down in his diary, an' reminded him every day since, an' pointed it out last night, last thing, and that's why he ain't here this mornin'; an' I didn't expect he would be; but, all the same, what's to be done?"

"Done! why, say Old Nick, that is, — I beg his pardon, — Nicholas Ferrette, Esq., is engaged in the trial of a cause in the superior court."

"Oh, that won't wash! I've tried that on once too many times. They sent over the last time to see, an' I thought I was caught in a nice box; but I said if he wasn't there he oughter be, an' 'twasn't my fault he wasn't; an' that tickled the judge, an' he laughed, an' let me have the adjournment."

"Then, Gouge'll be defaulted, that is all; and he ought to be; got no case, but Nick'll be ravin' all the same."

"Well, what does he expect?"

"Expect! Come on, an' don't be a fool, — only five minutes to get there. Expect! You know well enough what he expects: he expects to keep the case on the calendar till the judge gets mad and disposes of it in some way, and then he expects to cuss and swear till the air's black and blue, and lay the blame on you or me, and try some hocus-pocus to get it put back again. Did you ever know him to try a case out and out, fair and square, in your life?"

"Yes," said Popsy, with a laugh, — "Dasher *agst.* Crasher."

"Sure enough ; and how was that ? He got caught by mistake ; and the judge made him go on, and the 'other side' knocked the socks off of him. But here we are now : look alive ! come to me as soon as you get through."

The two parted at the entrance to the City Hall park as the clock was striking nine.

Joe hastened from court-room to court-room, and, by dint of glib representations to the various "other sides" of the utter impossibility of "going on," by entreaties, by promises, and by a tact acquired by long experience, he succeeded, as usual, in getting his cases postponed, — postponed, as half the cases on the calendar, on one pretext or another, were postponed ; while impatient parties — plaintiff or defendant — wondered at the law's delay.

Coming out at length, about noon, in the main hall of the court-house he found the cheerful Popsy awaiting him.

"Well ?"

"Well."

"What d'ye do ?"

Popsy thrust his tongue in his cheek, and pointed up.

"Whew ! There'll be a lively old time down at the office, then."

Popsy nodded with a grin.

"Can't help it. Let him 'tend to his own business, then," exclaimed Joe with a sudden burst of indignation : "I'm sick of shenaniganin' round for him ; 'ts all kicks an' no coppers. When d'he pay you last ?"

"Not a cent for six weeks."

"An' me only five dollars in two months, an' that I had to bone out of him. If I didn't make a few pennies outside his office, I should starve to death."

"Why don't you leave, then ?"

"Because I can't, an' he knows it : he owes me a hundred dollars, an' I can't afford to lose it ; besides, nobody'd take me, if they knew I'd been with him."

The indignant senior lowered his voice as they approached the office, where they found Mr. Nicholas Ferrette seated at his desk, making another raw wound in his blotter, and awaiting their coming impatiently.

Mr. Joe Piverton sauntered into the presence of his employer with a labored air of unconcern.

"Well!" exclaimed the latter sharply, without raising his eyes.

"I had the Tracy motions put over."

"How long?"

"A week."

Mr. Ferrette hitched in his chair, and his scowling brows slightly relaxed.

"I got the case in Part I. set down for Friday; but the judge says he is going to clear the calendar of those old cases, and we must be ready then."

Mr. Ferrette made a wider and wider wound in the blotter, and his face darkened.

"But," continued Joe, carefully studying the effect of his words, "I had a great stroke of luck in Part II. The other side wasn't ready; so I pressed for trial, made a great splurge about getting our witnesses there again, — said if we didn't try now it must go off for the term; and so at length it did."

Mr. Ferrette looked up quickly, his forehead cleared, and his moustache distended into a momentary smile.

"Then I went into the clerk's office, and entered up judgment in" —

"But how about 'Dunn *agst.* Gouge?'"

"Rather bad news there."

"Eh?"

"Popsy 'tended to that. He can tell you" —

"Where is he?"

"Here."

Popsy reluctantly advanced.

"I told the judge you was in the superior court, trying an important case."

"Well?"

"But he said he didn't care where you was: he'd given you fair warnin' 'bout that case."

"What then?" demanded Mr. Ferrette sharply, and with a threatening look.

"He took your default."

"Hell and furies!" screamed the attorney, starting from his seat. "Did you stand there, and let my case be defaulted?"

"What could I do? I told you before that the judge said you must be there, or he should default you."

There was a noise like a hiss in the room. Joe and Popsy both started in amazement. It was only an exclamation uttered by Mr. Ferrette, whose head suddenly seemed to flatten and contract, his eyes to gleam malignantly, and his whole person to take on a most striking and loathsome semblance to an aroused reptile.

"Don't stand there and say what you told me!" he cried. "You went there to attend to my case; and you stood like a jabbering idiot, and let them take a default. Why didn't you say you had your witnesses there, and would come after me?"

"Because when I did that last week in Lofte, *agst.* Lowe, you told me to go to the devil, an' not to come after you when you had sent me to look after a case."

"It's a lie! It ought to burn your throat!" yelled the now infuriated man. "And you," he continued, whirling about upon Joe, "what did you leave my business to that fool for? Why didn't you do it yourself?"

"I couldn't be in three places at once, and I thought"—

"Damn what you thought! You always do it. If I turn my back for a minute, my business goes to rack and ruin. You're a lazy loafer."

Joe turned pale. His lips trembled: he could scarcely control himself to speak.

"Mr. Ferrette, how"—

"You're a loafer—a dirty loafer!" shrieked the furious attorney. "Sit down there, and make out an affidavit that I am sick in bed; and go up and get an order to show cause why that default should not be opened."

"I can't swear that you're sick in bed when you're here."

"You can't, eh? You're a fine sweet-scented beggar: you can let my business go to ruin, though. I *am* sick; I ought to be in bed; and the only reason I ain't is, because I can't leave my office in the care of such wretched vermin!"

The first quick look of pride and anger in the clerk's face gave way gradually to an expression of deep shame and degradation, as the generous impulse of manhood was ground down and crushed under the iron heel of necessity.

"Write that affidavit, I say!" screamed Mr. Ferrette, coming up to his clerk's desk.

"I am willing to write any affidavit I can consistently," he replied submissively.

"Write what I tell you."

"I cannot write any affidavit that will do you any good," he said at length in a low hoarse voice, but with a sudden firmness.

Mr. Ferrette was acute enough to see that he had pushed his drudge to the wall. He stopped, and regarded him a moment with sullen malice, then uttered an oath, and turned away saying, —

"I'll write it myself, then; and you shall take it, and go and get that order before you go to bed to-night. If I tell what a set of lubbers I've got here to attend to my business, any judge that is a white man'll give me the order. Now," he continued, throwing down an envelope upon the desk, "take these papers, and make out a summons and complaint in 'Badger *agst.* Gould,' — there are the facts, and names of parties, — make copies, and send Popsy to serve them on the defend-

ant to-night. See if your conscience will allow you to do that !”

It was late in the afternoon when Joe started out of the office armed with Mr. Ferrette's affidavit. He did not read the affidavit ; perhaps he knew well enough the nature of Mr. Ferrette's affidavits already. He hurried up to the court-house ; the court was adjourned. One of the deputy-sheriffs said the judge he wanted to see had gone down town. On the way back, Joe met him walking on the street. He was a large man of Hibernian extraction. Joe told his business. His Honor, with an expression of impatience, turned into a neighboring cigar-shop, called brusquely for a pen, and without reading the affidavit, or demanding any explanation of its contents from Joe, signed it hastily, called for the best cigar in the shop, took it, lighted it, and coolly walked away, leaving Joe to pay fifty cents for the cigar.

It was later still, in fact, long after dark, when Popsy was posted off with the “Badger *agst.* Gould” papers, and Joe at length took his homeward way to Pike's Court, — a weary pilgrim.

“Oh ! what *has* kept you so ?” demanded his sister on his entrance. “You can't surely be kept at the office until this time. I'm really faint for my supper.”

“Yes, old girl, 'tis a shame to keep you waiting : you shall have it right away,” he returned with resolute cheerfulness ; and he took himself at once to the kitchen, where, however, he was gone so long, that his sister at length dragged herself slowly to the door, after repeatedly ringing the bell to no purpose, and opening it beheld her brother before a small broken looking-glass in the corner, brandishing the poker at his own image, and saying fiercely, —

“You miserable, detestable, cowardly bully ! you've trodden upon me long enough. I won't bear it an hour longer, — not a minute, not a second ! I'll choke your dastardly life out ! I'll pound you to a jelly ! I'll” —

"Joe, Joe!" gasped out his sister in affright. "Are you crazy? What are you doing?"

"Eh? what!" exclaimed Joe, turning about quickly with a foolish look, and scratching his head. "I was only — only just saying a part in a play."

"A play!" repeated his sister querulously, "while I am suffering for my supper."

"Yes; and you shall have it in the turning of a peg-top: see, the tea-kettle is boiling. Go back, Liz my dear, I'll be there in a minute now."

After he had given his sister her tea, and helped her to bed, Joe wandered out in the passage, and up and down the rickety stairs, and at length sat down on the lowest step, where presently a dark figure passed him on the way up. He recognized Mrs. Flannigan, clumsily trying to conceal a bottle under her arm.

"Ah, Misther Pivleton, is it ye that's in it? 'deed, an' ye almost frightened the life out o' me."

"I'm very sorry: I thought you would know me. I say, Mrs. Flannigan, I — I suppose perhaps Buster is gone to bed by this time."

"Troth he is that, an' two hours ago; an' I'm afther slippin' out to git a bit o' med'cine for the childher. Good-night to ye, Misther Pivleton."

Joe went wearily back to his own rough couch in a little pantry off the kitchen; and there at length the buzzing and whirring and crashing and roaring gradually grew fainter and farther off as the wheels, big and little, one by one rested from motion, and peace — the only absolute peace known to this human life — came softly hovering down upon him in the guise of sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GHOST.

THE dictionaries define a dinner, with flippant brevity, as "the principal meal of the day." This is all very well for a dictionary, and perhaps all we ought to expect; but a dinner is much more than this. It is not only the chief meal of the day, it is the chief event of the day. It is the end and aim of each of those little twenty-four-hour lives of ours that stretch from sleep to sleep. It is often the whole "reason of being." It is, in fine, the pivot upon which the world moves. By the world, we mean, of course, the world that is worth talking about, the world that knows what a dinner is; and not at all the world that sits down, and eats so much corned beef and cabbage to fill the hole in its stomach; nor the world, again, that goes through a solemn and aimless wagging of the jaws as a matter of custom, or out of a blind deference to social conventions; nor yet the valetudinary world that stands, with dyspeptic shiver upon the shore of this daily Rubicon, and enviously watches the hardy tempter of the flood.

All of which is prefatory to saying that Mrs. Gould had invited a small company to dinner to meet the Houghtons. The latter having already, in due form, entertained the Goulds, this was a squaring of the social account.

If, as has been said, receiving company affords a crucial test of a woman's social ability, Mrs. Gould sustained the ordeal with credit. She devoted herself to her guests without obtrusiveness, and appeared refreshingly free from small anxieties. Having evidently

ordered her feast with care in the first place, she fortified herself against mishap by an enviable indifference, and showed herself able to talk at her own table without a wandering eye or a divided attention.

Noll had duly protested against the threatened intimacy with the Houghtons; but, finding himself obliged to meet them, he was sufficiently polite and attentive, every thing, in fact, but cordial. At his own house, he perhaps congratulated himself that his duties of host relieved him from the necessity of paying particular attention to Miss Houghton. Luckily for him the party was small, and the conversation general.

In the desultory, hap-hazard talk of the dinner-table, any subject comes naturally upon the carpet. By some accident, "ghosts" was the topic started at Mrs. Gould's table.

And, as everybody knows, no topic is more fruitful. All the world has a ghost-story or queer experience to tell, always be it said, dated, and located so as to be conveniently safe from investigation. Bold indeed is the man who dare place his ghostly story or event within the reach of sceptical examination! It therefore created a genuine sensation when Noll quietly said, —

"Perhaps you do not know that *we* have a ghost. My mother shakes her head, you see: but I consider it really our one sole claim to distinction, that we have a family ghost; not a vulgar closet-skeleton such as everybody has, but a downright spectre that is up to his business, and knows how to haunt."

Mrs. Gould looked for a moment annoyed, but laughingly admitted when appealed to, —

"Why, yes, I believe there is an absurd story of the kind."

"Tell us about it: let us have it. Do tell us!" cried everybody in a chorus.

"Why," she continued good-naturedly, "there is very little to tell. We have some stores down town, —

a row of granite buildings, — supposed to stand upon the site of one of the old homesteads of the island. The name of the former owner was Damen, and thus the block is called 'Damen's Row.' The Row was built many years ago, and was, of course, near the centre of things then, which accounts, I suppose, for the presence of a small hall in the rear of the third story, which was evidently once fitted up for a secret society of some sort, as there are various cabalistic characters and inscriptions upon the wall. It is an odd-looking place; and my husband took a whim to keep it as it was, instead of turning it into offices; and so it came to be a general store-room where old furniture and various lumber has been packed away for many years."

"But the ghost?"

"The ghost, like the rest of his fraternity, is a very unreliable and unsatisfactory personage. It would be rank heresy, I suppose, to doubt his existence; but as nobody has ever seen him, and he is only heard of at long intervals, I have always identified him with Tim the porter, a cross-grained, faithful old fellow, who has had charge of the 'Row' for many years, and, who, if he be not the ghost himself, certainly has a Box-and-Cox arrangement with the spectre to haunt the hall by turns, the one by day, and the other by night."

"Mamma, you perceive, has an eye to business," interposed Oliver. "She snubs the poor ghost because he pays no rent, and would not be considered a comfortable neighbor by the other tenants. But I am not so sordid: I bid him welcome to the old hall, and consider him an uncommonly quiet and well-behaved spook."

"How I *should* like to see him!" cried Miss Houghton, "and that queer old hall. I wish you would let us go down there, Mrs. Gould."

"You are quite welcome to go, my dear; but you would not find it worth while: the dusty old hall would not prove very interesting, I fear."

"Perhaps the ghost would appear if we kept still. Of course we should want to go at night."

"The ghost, I believe, has a fashion of always being out when you go to call upon him."

"Ug-h-h!" shuddered the young lady, "isn't it frightfully delightful? Oh, I must go! I should not mind the trouble. I am willing to take the chance," pleaded the young woman, with the pampered unreasonableness of an only child. "It would be *such* a sensation, going into a haunted room. I wonder if my blood would creep. Mamma, will you go? Why cannot we make up a party? Come, let us all go!"

The proposal was received with unexpected favor; and, after some consultation, it was arranged that all should go the following evening to visit the old hall.

It was a cloudy, dismal night. The dark granite façade of "Damen's Row" looked unusually frowning and grim when the little party arrived the next evening about nine o'clock before the main entrance. After repeated knocking and ringing, a noise was at length heard inside: the heavy bolts were drawn, the door was cautiously opened, and old Tim's scowling visage appeared. At sight of his mistress he reluctantly made way, and, after some demur, consented to lead the party up-stairs, not without a grumbled aside that it was "a quare thing for a sinsible woman to be goin' skylarkin' about that-a-way."

Arrived at the third story, they proceeded to the end of a long passage, and paused before a pair of large folding-doors, while old Tim, with much grumbling and muttering, fitted a rusty key to the lock. The door was at length opened; and, with looks of unconcealed curiosity and expectation, the party entered the hall. Although a large room, it had a close and musty smell, from having been so long shut up; the bare walls echoed to every step; the feeble spark in old Tim's lantern—for it was found that all the

gas-fixtures had been removed — threw a dim and flickering light over the tumultuous heaps of old lumber deposited here and there about the floor ; and altogether the place looked not unfitted for supernatural visitation.

After peering about, alternately shouting and talking with bated breath, examining the half-effaced inscriptions on the walls, and generally satisfying their curiosity, the party was about to withdraw, when Miss Houghton whispered to Noll, who was escorting her, —

“I’m dreadfully sorry the ghost didn’t come out. Do you really suppose there is any? Do you suppose he is in there now somewhere? It looks as if he might be, doesn’t it? There are too many of us, I guess. I wish I could be left here all alone just for a few minutes.”

“If you would like to try,” said Noll good-naturedly, “we will loiter behind until the others get down stairs, and I will wait for you in the passage.”

“Do you suppose it would scare me to death?”

“Not at all ; but, if you are afraid, you had better not try.”

“I’m not afraid now. But if he — it, I mean — should happen to come out, I should be — but how absurd ! of course it will not.”

“Very well,” said Noll, approaching the door : “they are going down stairs now ; I will step outside, and wait.”

“Don’t go far away !”

“Certainly not.”

“And if I should be still a great while, you know, you must come in : perhaps I should be so scared I couldn’t scream. Oh, dear ! my heart begins to beat already. Don’t tell mamma !”

Noll went out, leaving the door slightly ajar. He groped his way down the passage, and, leaning over the balusters, heard the voices of the rest of the party as they descended, and watched the dancing light

upon the wall as the lantern swung to and fro. Any apprehensions he may have felt, that his companion might be too frightened to cry out, were presently relieved by a piercing scream from the hall. He rushed through the entry and into the room. Miss Houghton met him near the door gasping with terror.

"He is coming ! he is right there ! Oh, quick, let me go !"

"No, no : it is nothing ; don't be afraid ! I will protect you," cried Noll re-assuringly, as he led his companion from the room.

The alarm had been heard below, and the rest of the party came hurrying back. Noll explained the situation ; and Miss Houghton, as soon as she had recovered her breath, protested, that, directly after she was left alone, she had heard a slight noise proceeding from one side of the room, which presently grew louder, and sounded like a human footstep coming directly towards her, whereupon she had screamed, and rushed for the door.

"Did you see any thing?" asked several voices.

"I turned my head. I thought I would have one look if it killed me — and there was" —

"What?"

"Nothing ; but I heard the footsteps all the same."

The whole party, disregarding a derisive exclamation of "Rats !" from old Tim, now returned to the hall, and stood in the spot that Miss Houghton pointed out. Hardly had they become quiet, when she cried out again, "There, there it is ! Don't you hear it?"

All listened ; and, sure enough, there was a noise closely answering the description. The gentlemen at once set about making an investigation ; and it was presently discovered that a slat in an old-fashioned ventilator in the wall had become loose, and, when the door was left open, it flapped up and down in the draught, making a noise strangely like a stealthy, scuffling human step.

Everybody was no doubt secretly disappointed at such a humdrum explanation ; but the incident, with its attendant excitement, lent a pleasing variety to the evening's experiences, and gave rise, of course, to much jocular criticism of the absent spectre, and abundant sceptical reflections upon the supernatural generally, as the party took its way home.

When the Goulds reached their own house, they found a strange young man waiting in the hall.

"You Mrs. Gould?" he asked, coolly regarding that lady.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Anny Gould?"

"Mrs. Anne Gould."

"All right: you're the one!" he exclaimed, drawing from his pocket a paper fresh from the pen of Mr. Joe Pivleton, and putting it into her hand.

"What is this?"

"You'll find out fast enough, I guess," retorted the imperturbable junior, as he donned his cap, and disappeared.

Mrs. Gould read the superscription upon the paper, and said, —

"It's rather odd that we should have troubled ourselves to go away down there to hunt up Damen's Ghost, and come home to find him crouching upon our own hearthstone."

This was a strange speech of Mrs. Gould's. Her son looked at her with a puzzled expression, and years afterwards reminded his mother of her words.

CHAPTER X.

A FIELD-DAY.

“**W**HITHER away now, Queeny?” asked Oliver, indolently looking up from his book, as his mother came into the room, with her bonnet on, one morning, about a week after the dinner-party.

“To the four winds, my dear: this is to be a field-day.”

“What is that?”

“Something you know nothing about.”

“But I live to learn,” he urged.

“Yes; and this is one of the penances we pay for living and not learning,” returned his mother, settling her bonnet upon her head, and tightening the strings under her chin.

“Heigho, we pay a good many!”

“Heigho, indeed! Button my glove, and have done with sighing, you ridiculous boy! And let me tell you, as a lesson in point, that if you can contrive to live and learn how to get the better of procrastination, you will have fewer of those sighs to heave, and will thereby cheat your soul of half its fated discipline, — which may be a good thing, or may not: I am not prepared to say.”

“But about the field-day,” he continued, idly persistent.

“The field-day is nothing more nor less than clearing my slate of a lot of petty annoyances that will give me no peace until they are disposed of; and, as I feel pretty vigorous this morning, I’m going about it.”

“Pooh, let them go!”

"Then little bothers presently become big bothers, which is the lesson I am trying to teach you."

"And what are some of your bothers? Let us hear what you call bothers," said Noll, with a quizzical look, as he finished buttoning the glove, and gave his mother a sudden embrace which almost took her breath.

"There, there, you are breaking my bones! What do I call bothers?" repeated Mrs. Gould, looking over her memorandum-book, "why, these: going to the dentist's, hiring a cook, scolding the dressmaker, matching some lace — Yes, and I had nearly forgotten, — that miserable law-paper; find it, Noll, in my writing-desk."

"The Badger case?"

"Yes: I'll drop in, and leave it with Judge Clark, and have an end of that. Good-by: I shall be back to luncheon."

The stress of Mrs. Gould's other engagements left her little opportunity to talk law; and she barely took time to state her business to her counsel, a courtly old gentleman, who received her with much respect.

"Auld acquaintance is not to be forgot, you see, judge," she said, shaking hands. "I had almost hoped you and I might forget each other, at least professionally; but it is decreed otherwise, it seems. I have come in to-day on a matter that is quite too contemptible to notice, except that I suppose there is a formal way in which such things are proceeded with. Here is an absurd paper that has been served upon me, which I was tempted to throw in the fire, till I thought that I should thereby only be making myself more trouble."

"And what's it all about?" asked the judge, taking the papers, and adjusting his glasses.

"Oh! it's only a little breeze stirred up by those disaffected Badgers."

"Badgers? Ah, yes! the disappointed legatees."

"Yes: they have waited all these years, and have at last found somebody unscrupulous enough to undertake their business."

"Ha, ha! they're rather late in the day."

"Oh! it's only an attempt to intimidate me; but I leave it to you to take care of. I hope you'll think up some way of punishing them. Glad to see you looking so well. Hope business is good, which means that I hope other folks have their share of trouble: it's best for us all, you know, not to have too easy a time of it. Good-by. Don't get up: I know the way."

Nothing could exceed the confidence and indifference of Mrs. Gould's manner as she went away to scold her dressmaker, and engage her cook.

And perhaps she was as indifferent as she seemed, and did not really give the matter a second thought till she received a short note from the judge one morning within the week, asking her to call at her early convenience.

"More Badger!" was her sole comment, as she tossed the note into the waste-basket.

However, she found it convenient to put on her bonnet during the day, and go down to see about it.

"How is this, judge? cannot you cope with these creatures single-handed?" she asked, cheerily shaking hands.

"Ha! well, I don't know; I'm afraid not; ra-a-ther afraid not! Truth is, it begins to look a little serious. Take a seat, Mrs. Gould. Fine day: hope this hasn't inconvenienced you?"

"No more than taking any trouble about it would inconvenience me; that is to say, feeling that I had been imposed upon to that extent."

"Yes, I understand you. I was disposed at first to take that view of it myself. Indeed, I thought, on reading over this complaint," continued the judge,

taking up the paper, — "which is a rambling, ill-drawn affair, full of irrelevancies and misstatements, — I thought, I say, that it was nothing but a rather enterprising attempt to extort money from you."

"And what else is it?" asked Mrs. Gould contemptuously.

"Why, there is a law point involved, quite an important point. I have been looking into it carefully; and I am very much astonished to find that there is something in it, — decidedly something in it."

"There is certainly a good deal of wholesale impudence in it; and that's all, so far as I can see. But how comes it, judge, that you didn't see this before?"

"You remember I was not your counsel during the settlement of the estate, and the point has never come directly before me for examination until now."

"And what is the result of your examination?"

"Why, I regret to say, in my judgment, they have a good case."

"Pooh, pooh!" returned Mrs. Gould angrily: "you must be mistaken; it can't be possible! Do you mean to tell me that these wretched conspirators can come in now at the eleventh hour, and strip me of every thing I have in the world, or take the bulk of my son's inheritance, money that his father earned by his own personal industry and enterprise, and carefully invested for this boy, his only son, his one darling child, whose future was the great object of his solicitude? My dear judge, you have overlooked something: you have misunderstood the facts. It is simply and entirely impossible that there can be any law so wildly silly and fatuous!"

Either the judge was well accustomed to Mrs. Gould's forceful manner, or he had rare self-control; for he replied with unmoved calmness, as he cleaned his eye-glass upon his silk pocket-handkerchief, —

"Your indignation is very natural; and it will be very hard, I fear, to reconcile you to the view of the

case which I have felt myself compelled to take, as it is based upon a purely technical point. I am very sorry to have to make such an announcement to you. It's a hard case, very hard," repeated the judge, as he settled the eye-glass upon his nose. "I don't know that I remember one more trying in my whole professional experience."

"Do you mean seriously to tell me that these people have the *right* to make this demand?"

Mrs. Gould's eyes were round, well-opened, and direct; her eyebrows bristled; her mouth grew firm and tight; and it was a very unpleasant task to meet her look, and tell her such unwelcome news. The judge, though plainly uncomfortable, acquitted himself of his duty quietly and firmly.

"They have the legal right, most assuredly."

"How?"

"It is, as I said, a technical point. Legacies are usually paid out of the personal property. If there is no personal property, and there is undevise real estate, they must then be paid out of that."

"Exactly: that is not this case; every particle of real estate which my husband owned was specifically devised, either to me or to my son."

"Yes: I am aware of that; it is that precise point of which I wish to speak. That devise of real estate to your son was nugatory."

"I do not understand."

"Where an ancestor, by his will, devises to his heir the very identical estate which the heir would have taken in the due course of law without the will, it has been decided in this State that the heir takes by descent, and not by purchase; that is, he takes under the law of inheritance instead of under the will."

"And in this case?"

"In this case your husband devised to his son the precise estate he would have taken otherwise; the law makes the devise void; and the executor is there-

fore obliged to pay the legacies out of the real estate, precisely as if it had not been devised."

Mrs. Gould made no comment for several minutes ; but sat steadfastly regarding her counsel, who uneasily twirled his eye-glass.

"I have heard," she said at length, "that the law tried to carry out the intent of the person making a will, where that was manifest. Now, here, nothing is more clear than that my husband designed this property for his son ; and it seems a strange mockery of justice that his mistaken generosity, with regard to the rest of his estate, should be the means of defeating this life-cherished plan."

The judge bowed without speaking.

"If you maintain that this is the law," continued Mrs. Gould bitterly, "you must acknowledge that it steps in like a highwayman to rob my child of his father's bounty ; that instead of furthering, it actually interferes to defeat, justice ; and that men like yourself are trained and educated to regard this as right, to study, work, and contrive to bring it about."

"I sympathize with your disappointment, Mrs. Gould ; but I cannot allow you to traduce my profession. The law," continued the judge, betrayed into a defence of his profession, "is the noblest calling that can engage human faculties. There are, no doubt, imperfections in our system of jurisprudence : it was designed to establish the rights and subserve the well-being of the greatest number. And so, in the main, it does. That it should, in rare cases, work apparent wrong to the individual, is inevitable. But it is a grand system. It is a liberal education to any man to have studied it. It is an honor to any man to be ranked among its students."

"The system is like most other systems, I suppose," returned Mrs. Gould impatiently, "very fine in theory. That is no consolation to me if it does

me a wrong ; but now, about our own case, what's to be done ? ”

“ I should advise you to try and arrange a settlement. ”

“ You mean to compromise ? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ I will never do it, ” said the indignant lady, in a much quieter tone, but with a significant emphasis.

“ It might save you a considerable sum of money. ”

“ Judge, ” began Mrs. Gould, entirely disregarding the last remark, “ this is merely your own individual opinion you have given me, I suppose ? ”

The judge bowed.

“ It may be sound, and it may not, then ? ”

The judge bowed again.

“ Different lawyers, I suppose, have different views of the law. Certainly different courts have, else why are so many cases appealed ? ”

“ Very true. ”

“ It is possible that you may be mistaken. ”

“ Barely. ”

“ You will not be surprised to hear, then, that I shall take the benefit of the doubt. ”

“ I am sorry to hear you say so. ”

“ And hereby direct you to go on, and defend the suit. ”

“ It will be under protest. ”

“ I will take the risk. ”

“ Mrs. Gould, I am sure you will regret it. I beg you to take a little time to think it over. Think ” —

“ Excuse me for interrupting you. I dare say I shall seem unreasonable ; but I assure you that any expostulation will be quite in vain. My mind is made up. Are you unwilling to undertake the case ? ”

“ I am willing to put in a formal defence. I am willing to take advantage of any mistakes made by the other side. I am willing to do my best for you ; but, at the same time ” —

"I absolve you entirely. I take the responsibility.
Is there any thing more?"

"Nothing."

"Then good-morning."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FRENCH PLAY.

"REGINA *incedit*," cried Noll one morning, throwing open the door of the breakfast-room with a mock flourish, as his mother came bustling through the hall.

"And *puer ludit* as usual," she returned, taking his arm, as she passed, and leading the way to the table. "Noll, I have a little charity scheme on foot, in which I want your help."

"Why!" exclaimed the young man, pursing up his mouth to a conservative pucker, "I should be very glad; but the fact is" —

"Oh, do not be alarmed! it's not to subscribe; it's only to work."

"Ah, that's different! my humble faculties are at your service."

"I am thinking of getting up something," continued Mrs. Gould, busily pouring the coffee: "some sort of an entertainment to make money."

"Another fair, I suppose!"

"No, not a fair; there is too much machinery to a fair: I've been thinking of a concert or a play, and I rather incline to a play."

"Yes: a standard comedy, for instance, done by a lot of greenhorns, rigid with self-consciousness and finery; but then, the doting mammas like it; they buy the tickets, and the other girls and fellows are envious; and — Oh, it's great fun, a play is, and not a bit of trouble!"

"Why, it's more or less trouble, of course; every thing is trouble: but we won't attempt any thing

ambitious,—only a bright little French play, having two or three characters, with somebody to play the piano while you are putting on your wigs."

"French?"

"Yes: one must follow the fashion in such matters, and Miss Houghton tells me that is the latest conceit."

"So you have been consulting that saucy little chit?"

"Yes: I casually mentioned it to her the other day."

"You didn't ask her to play, I hope?"

"I forget as to that, but of course I intimated something of the sort after speaking to her."

"Then you may count me out."

"Fie, fie, fie! Do not be so silly, Noll! She would make a charming little actress, I am sure."

"Not a doubt of it."

"What is your objection, then? I very much doubt if you have one that is tangible."

"My sufficient objection is, that I could not get along with her."

"Pooh, pooh! you have taken some boyish prejudice"—

"Quite right: I have."

"Which is utterly unreasonable and ill-founded."

"That does not appear."

"I am very sure it will appear, and very speedily too, if you would take the pains to go and call upon Miss Houghton, and really get acquainted with her."

"Perhaps."

"Pray, my son, whatever you may do in this instance, learn to found your opinions upon a more solid basis than whims and fancies. Try to get out of this childish way of trusting wholly to impressions. Take a little time to make up your mind."

"May it please your most gracious majesty, that is precisely what I'm doing," returned the young man, as he rose from the table and sauntered to the window.

"I *am* taking time: it is you who rush to the hasty

and unwarrantable conclusion that this strange young woman is an angel, and thrust her upon my notice. Now," he continued, stopping before a small Venetian mirror to criticise his moustache, "I am tempted to indulge you: I have half a mind to go around and call upon this chirping little Katy-Did, get acquainted with her, as you call it, and satisfy myself that I am *not* mistaken: but this is upon one condition."

"Condition!" repeated the mother in an amused tone.

"That I shall not be asked to play with her, to meet her, to be bored with her in any way, from this time forth for evermore. What do you say?"

"What should I say? It is no concern of mine: go or stay, as you please. If you neglect the opportunity of getting acquainted with the loveliest girl in the city, the fault is your own."

"Oh, well! I don't mind giving her one more chance," said Noll, with a look of mischief, and a patronizing air, "but it's the last, remember."

"There, there, go! you ridiculous boy, and see that you display none of your absurd airs to the young lady herself."

Miss Houghton was at home when Noll went to call. She was seated in a sumptuous room, surrounded by textures and colors well suited to set off her own tints. If Noll was prejudiced, he was not blind. His face now betrayed him. He paid his young hostess a reluctant tribute in the ill-concealed look of admiration with which he regarded her. Moreover, as Miss Houghton's charm lay by no means entirely in color and outline, but largely in that indefinable grace of manner the world calls "style," she had formidable resources to fall back upon. In motion she could no more go amiss than a kitten. Whether she bent over a book, turned to glance over her shoulder, or sat with hands carelessly dropped in her lap, each new attitude

seemed more incomparable than the last. She may not have been unaware of this: she may have posed a very little now and then. What then? Would not all the world pose if they could produce such effects? At the appearance of her guest she came briskly forward, and shook hands.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Gould."

"Thank you."

"And a little surprised too."

"Indeed!"

"Yes: I didn't think you would come to call upon me."

"Why not?"

"Oh! because" — she stopped as if a sudden recollection of her position as hostess had bridled her tongue, and concluded magnanimously, "but never mind, so long as you have."

"Is that fair?"

"No, it isn't; but, do you know, I have a horrid suspicion that" —

"What?"

"That your mother sent you."

Noll reddened, and looked down for a moment with a mingled expression of amusement and embarrassment upon the arch face beaming up into his own. On the instant, however, he seemed to adopt new tactics: he threw aside his dignity, and answered, with a smile, —

"She did."

"Oh! I thought so," exclaimed the young lady with a delighted laugh. "Poor man, I pity you with all my heart! Isn't it a dreadful bore?"

"Horrible."

"You saucy creature! How did she make you come?"

"Threatened my life."

"Now you're finessing in order to mislead me."

"Yes."

"You think perhaps I shall take it for a jest."

"Exactly," said Noll, looking intensely amused, but preserving a mock gravity.

"But I do not."

"Oh, dear!"

"I'm *sure* your mother made you come."

"So she did, I assure you."

"What did she want you to come for?"

"To find out how much I was mistaken in you."

"Now you are trying to scare me by being frank."

"Why, what did you think of me?"

"I thought—I thought you were"—

"Horrid!"

"Yes; rather."

"You dreadful man! that is because I didn't like the coins."

"Yes."

"But I did."

"You pretended to."

"So you pretended not to be angry."

"Yes."

"And you really were?"

"Oh, a bottled Vesuvius!"

"I knew it: are you all over it now?"

"Pretty much."

"Let us shake hands, then—I humbly beg pardon!"

She extended her hand, Noll gravely put forth his own, and they exchanged greetings.

"So much for the coins—but I haven't any coins; and I'm sorry to say mamma is not at home to help entertain you."

"Indeed!" returned Oliver, apparently not considering his words, "I'm very sorry."

Miss Houghton, with a look of suppressed merriment, choked down the comment that rose to her lips. Noll caught the look, understood it, and the situation was relieved by a mutual and simultaneous little laugh.

"You know what I meant," he continued presently ;
"but that reminds me of my own mamma, and her
scheme for an entertainment."

"Oh, the French play ! Will it not be lovely ? Are
you going to act ?"

"I don't know."

"Why, I've found a play, — and there's such a
part for you. Did you ever read it ? — '*La Niaise
de Saint Flour*.' I am to be Madeleine, that is, '*La
Niaise*.'"

"Impossible !" cried Noll, shaking his head skeptic-
ally.

"Why ?"

"You cannot do it."

"Wait and see. Here is the play," she said, jump-
ing up, and taking a small book from the table. "Let
me see. All the *niaiserie* comes in one scene, which
you and I have together" —

"You and I ? Pray, who am I ?"

"You ? Why, you are — let me see ; you are *Léo-
nard*, of course."

"Indeed !"

"Yes : it will suit you beautifully."

"But I haven't made up my mind to play yet."

"Oh, well ! your mother said you should."

"Did she ? That alters the case : parents must be
obeyed. But pray, who is *Léonard* — the villain ?"

"Not exactly ; but he is the next thing."

"Oh !"

"You see, I have two lovers. One I like, and the
other I hate ; and you are the one I hate."

"I might prefer to be the other."

"Sh-h ! I declare, you have actually made a
pretty speech. But don't, don't !"

"Don't what ?"

"Don't go and spoil yourself. I like you best when
you're solemn and cross : it's more becoming. But as
for *Léonard*, I picked that out expressly for you : it's

ever so much the funnier. Let's read the scene, shall we?"

"If you like."

"Very well: here it is: *Scène dixhuitième, Léonard puis Madeleine. Va, mon garçon!* Have you a good accent?"

"No; abominable."

"Oh, what a pity! Never mind, I have; Monsieur Foulard says my accent is perfect: I'll drill you. Now, let's begin: please give me my cue."

"*Allons, il faut convenir que je suis un heureux coquin!*"

"Splendid! Only it isn't exactly '*cokang*,' you know. Can't you leave off the *g*, and yet give a flavor of it—a sort of ring in the nose? The way I got those words was to begin to say them, and then imagine I was shot dead right in the midst of it. But I go on; I say, '*Eh bien! tant pis! la! je vais jouer, moi,*' and then I go on playing all through the scene."

"Playing what?"

"Why, battledoor and shuttlecock. I shall have to practise it too. But will it not be pretty business? I shall go all about the stage, keeping my *volant* in air, and taking no notice of you except just to answer."

"Very fine. But what am I to do?"

"Oh! you are to stand in the background, and glower, you know: making sweet speeches to me, and savage '*asides*' at my *niaiserie*."

"I'm afraid I should make no more of a success of the savage speeches than you of the *niaiserie*."

"Oh! yes, you would: you would do it to perfection. I can fancy you saying, for instance, '*Ah ça, mais voyons donc! Il y a un de nous qui est bête;*' or this last speech, that ends the scene,—what fervor you would throw into this! '*C'est ça! Elle est idiote tout-a-fait.*'"

"Why!" said Noll, preserving his gravity, "I might

perhaps *learn* to do such a thing; but you do not think that I" —

"Oh, yes! you do not need any practice. Just glare out from under your eyebrows, like this, and growl in that undertone you have. 'Twould be — oh, perfection!"

Noll laughed outright at the imitation of himself as he replied, —

"Now I am going to heap coals of fire upon your head by saying that I don't think you will do at all for '*La Niaisé*.'"

"Shall I not? See: '*Oh! oh! est ce que les rivières ont des noms?*'"

"Good! I yield the point. We're both fine actors, I see; but I shall need a great deal of coaching on my accent."

"Oh, no! very little; and I shall be glad to offer my services, that is," added the young lady with an arch look, "if you can get your mother's leave to come for the lessons."

"I think we can count upon her not to oppose. Her interest is at stake," replied Noll, as he rose to go.

And Noll was right. Whether his mother was too much absorbed in other things, or whether she had deeper reasons, certain it is that she did not oppose. She showed, indeed, no curiosity about the result of the visit; but she nevertheless assumed, in a provoking, matter-of-course way, that every thing was going as she wished.

CHAPTER XII.

THE POORHOUSE.

MRS. GOULD was destined to find a field for her charitable energies other than she expected. Noll came down to breakfast one morning, to find her musing over an open letter.

"Good news, or bad, Queeny?"

"I hardly know."

"Let us see," he said, reading aloud over her shoulder:—

MY DEAR MADAM,—As one of the selectmen of this town I write to you in behalf of a pauper named Naomi Dill, who has recently been brought to our almshouse. I find, by inquiry, that she is a distant connection of your husband's family. She is about thirteen years old, without friends or means, and entirely blind. Any thing you may feel disposed to do in the matter will be appreciated by the town, as our poor-list, just now, is very large.

Yours truly,

ANDREW FARNSWORTH.

"Where is this place?"

"It's a little town in the interior of the State, near where your father was born."

"What's it all mean? another Badger game?" asked Noll, tossing down the letter, and stifling a yawn.

"No, I think not. There *were* Dills in your father's family, and I have always heard they were very well-to-do people. I can not make out who this one is, or how she came to be in this strait, poor thing!"

"What are you going to do?"

"I have been thinking; if it were an ordinary case I might take her home, and bring her up myself."

"What's extraordinary about it?"

"She is blind."

"To be sure : that is enough. Don't have her on any account !"

"Why not?"

"Oh, she would be a horrible bore, poor wretch ! You would never have any freedom again ; you would go leading her about with a string for the rest of your life."

"She would, undoubtedly, be a great care."

"Yes, yes, do something else : don't bring her here ! If you once take her, you could never send her adrift."

"Very true : I should make myself responsible for her whole future. It would be a great charge. I hesitate to undertake it. It might be all well enough while I am alive ; but I do not forget, vigorous as I am, that I am creeping farther down on the shady side of life every year."

"Pooh, pooh !" cried Noll angrily : "you're doing nothing of the sort ; you never were stronger in your life, so let's have no more such moribund twaddle."

"You silly boy," returned the mother, with a gratified smile, "we are all mortal, and we may as well recognize the fact ; which we can do, now and then, without being morbid, I hope. A little moribund speculation is a very wise and necessary part of my consideration of this question."

"Don't consider it at all, then ! Don't think of taking her. Do something else, but don't bring her here. She'd be a thousand times better off in an asylum."

"I have thought of that, but I am not sure."

"There can be no question about it : they're used to taking care of them there, they know how ; it's the only proper place for them."

"That may be : it depends upon the child. I shall decide upon nothing until I see her."

"Are you going to this place?"

"Yes: I can then see her, and judge for myself. Whatever else I may do, I shall, at any rate, take her away from the almshouse at once."

"I see very well," growled Noll, "it'll all end in your bringing her home."

"It will end, I hope, in my doing my duty as a Christian woman."

"Yes, in making an infirmary of your house, and neglecting the comfort and education of your only child. Go your ways, I wash my hands of it; but I give you warning, as soon as you get your happy family complete with the lame, and the halt, and the indigent senile, I shall be found wanting."

Mrs. Gould did go her ways, and in the course of the week set off for the little country town whence she had received the letter. She found Mr. Farnsworth, and drove with him to the almshouse. They were shown into a large, low-studded reception-room, furnished with a rag-carpet and hair-cloth furniture.

Mrs. Gould took a seat, and Mr. Farnsworth disappeared from the room. He came back presently with a lean, busy-looking woman, whom he introduced as the matron.

"Oh! how d'ye do?" she exclaimed, smoothing her hair hurriedly with her hands. "Come to see the Dill girl?"

"Yes."

"Well, I hope you ain't in a hurry: she's changin' her dress; would do it; she's bound to have her own way in spite of fate."

Mrs. Gould looked at the woman with cold, critical eyes: she did not seem pleased with her manner.

"I'd rather manage a two-year-old colt than that girl," continued the matron.

Mr. Farnsworth looked uneasy.

"Is she so headstrong?"

"Headstrong?" repeated the matron sharply, "when she's in one of her tantrums she'd bite a board-nail."

"Indeed!"

Mrs. Gould regarded the woman now with a settled coldness.

"Oh, well!" interjoined the selectman nervously, "taint so bad as that. Fact is, she hain't ben here long; an' she ain't quite used to it, you see."

At this moment the door opened, and a young girl appeared on the threshold. She stopped, inclined her head slightly to one side, made an auricular survey of the room, and evidently soon detected the position of its occupants, simply by their breathing. Her slight figure, small, sharp features, chalky white skin, raven black hair, and large gray eyes fringed with long lashes, gave her the air of a veritable sprite.

"This is the lady that has come to see you," said the matron with her hard, official tone.

A little irritable scowl appeared upon the child's face.

"Naomi, my dear, how do you do? will you come and shake hands with me? I am one of your cousins. I am Mrs. Gould."

The rich, sympathetic voice seemed to fall upon the child's ears like a revelation. She started, stopped; then, after a moment, came quickly forward — not in the timid, groping way peculiar to those deprived of sight, but with a free, fearless movement — to the stranger's side, put out her hand, and, quick as a flash, passed her supple fingers over the latter's face and head.

"I like your looks," she said bluntly. "Are you my cousin?"

"Not exactly your cousin, my dear, but a connection of your family."

"I never heard of you. Did you know my father?"

"No."

"Or my mother?"

"Neither: I have only heard their names."

"Who are you, then?"

"Do you remember your grandmother?"

"Yes: she was an ugly old woman."

"I am sorry you did not like her. She was my husband's cousin; and that's the way I am connected with you."

"Oh! never mind granny: she's dead, and perhaps I shall like you. Did you come on purpose to see me?"

"Yes: I came to see if I could help you."

Mr. Farnsworth and the matron had withdrawn towards the door, where they now stood listening with undisguised curiosity to the conversation. Mrs. Gould raised her eyes, and gave them a look that caused them to withdraw. The moment the door closed, the blind girl flung herself forward, seized Mrs. Gould's hand, and cried impetuously, —

"Oh! if you *are* my friend, take me away from here; take me anywhere, make me do any thing! I am quick and strong: I will work for you. I can sweep, I can scrub, I can sew; but I cannot stay here, and I *will* not," she cried vehemently. "I will run away: I was going to run away. They told me lies: they told me I was coming to a nice house, to be among friends; but I have found them out; I know what it is. Oh, my mother! It is — a — a — poor-house!"

She fell into Mrs. Gould's arms, and burst into a violent fit of weeping. Efforts at consolation were fruitless: it was the giving-way of a long-pent flood. Seeing the state of the case, Mrs. Gould sat quietly holding her until it was over. Then the child rose, and, as if ashamed of her own weakness, withdrew to a window across the room.

"How long have you been here, Naomi?"

"Ever since my mother died."

"How long is that?"

"I don't know: it seems like a hundred years."

"Have they been unkind to you?"

"Of course they have," answered the child shortly :—"why shouldn't they? That woman says I'm a blind beggar : who cares for a blind beggar?"

"Have you always been blind?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever been taught?"

"Been taught every thing."

"Did your mother live in this town?"

"Yes, she did : she was a dressmaker, — the best dressmaker you ever saw. She earned ever so much money : she bought me every thing. I had the best clothes of any girl in town, and everybody was very nice and sweet then. I could be a dressmaker too. I know how : I can fit dresses, only who'd give 'em to me? see!" she cried, approaching Mrs. Gould, and running her thin, delicate fingers over the latter's dress. "You've got on a cashmere dress trimmed with silk folds and buttons. The skirt is gored ; the waist doesn't fit ; it needs to be taken up on the shoulders."

"So it does, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Gould in astonishment.

"You said your husband is granny's cousin," said the child, retreating to her corner. "Is your husband a good man?"

"He *was* a good man : he is dead."

"All the good people are dead : I wish I was dead."

"Do not talk so, my dear, and do not think so ; such thoughts are wicked."

"You're not blind ; you're not a beggar ; what do you know about it? I've a right to my own thoughts, I guess," returned the girl resentfully.

"No, you have no right to such thoughts as those," replied Mrs. Gould firmly. "And, if I am to help you, it will be my first request that you put them all out of your mind."

"Could you put it out of your mind that you lived

in a poorhouse?" demanded Naomi with an angry sob.

"I am going to take you away from the poorhouse."

"Oh, take me now, then! Let's go quick; take my hand; I know the way; I will show you; don't let *her* see me! Come quick, quick, oh, do! I will go anywhere; I will do any thing!"

The child's passionate, irrepressible eagerness was pitiable.

"Stay, stay: hush, my dear!" said Mrs. Gould soothingly. "We will go directly; but I must see these people first. You need not see them. You can go and pack your things, and get on your bonnet."

The child almost bounded from the room in her delight. Mrs. Gould then opened the door, called in the selectman and the matron, who were talking outside, and, telling them that she had decided to take Naomi away, astonished the former by taking out her purse, and tendering him a handsome sum for the child's board and lodging. Mr. Farnsworth feebly protested.

"I shall insist; I object to the child's receiving public charity," said Mrs. Gould a little haughtily.

Mr. Farnsworth swallowed his scruples, and took the money. They went out, the matron following after, awed to silence by Mrs. Gould's manner and well-filled pocket-book. They found Naomi sitting on the door-step, ready and waiting. She sprang up, seized her new-found friend by the hand, and clambered eagerly after her into the wagon, disdaining a word of reply to the matron's civil farewell.

All the way to the city she sat silent and repressed, asking no questions, and apparently oblivious of what was going on around her. They arrived at Mrs. Gould's house long after nightfall; and the latter, thinking perhaps that the excitement of the day had already been sufficient, took care that the child should meet none of the family, but gave her a light supper, and put her directly to bed.

The next morning, as Noll sauntered lazily into the breakfast-room through the half-opened door, he stopped, and his brow contracted into a passing scowl at sight of a little figure with short skirts and hanging braids, going about the room busily touching and examining every thing in it. His first fleeting vexation evidently soon gave place to curiosity, and anon to admiration, as he noted the deftness with which she accomplished her task of making fingers do the work of eyes. He had not stirred a step from where he first beheld her ; his slippered feet had not made the slightest sound upon the thick carpet. Yet suddenly she stopped, turned quickly about, and asked, —

“Who are you?”

Receiving no answer, she spoke again, —

“You are not Mrs. Gould.”

A sudden impulse of mischief seized Noll. With an amused look at the keen, alert little creature, he answered in a feigned childish voice, —

“No : I'm myself.”

“Who is yourself?”

“A person.”

“What person?”

“First person singular — very singular !”

“Do you live in this house?”

“Sometimes.”

“What's your name?”

“Noll.”

“That's a nickname ! What's your other name?”

“That's a secret.”

“Pshaw ! how can it be? Are you related to Mrs. Gould?”

“Distantly.”

“How?”

“Her father was my grandfather.”

“Oh ! she's your aunt.”

“No, she isn't.”

“Then she's your mother.”

"Well, what if she is?"

"What made you say distantly, then? You're a sauce-box!"

"I shall tell my mother if you call me names," said Noll in a tone of boyish defiance.

"How big are you?"

"Not very big."

"But how big?"

"Big as you, at any rate."

"Do you go to school?"

"No."

"Ain't you ever going?"

"Never!"

"Then you'll never know any thing."

"I know lots now."

"Will you please let me come and look at you?"

"Yes, if you'll tell what you think of me."

"It won't be very flattering."

"Why so?"

"Because I don't like you."

"Oh! you'll change your mind when you see me. My mother thinks I'm charming. I am ready now."

Noll seated himself in a low chair. The child came groping across the room, passed her hand lightly across his face, and recoiled with a cry.

"What's the matter?"

"You're a grown-up man!"

"Did you think I was a woman?"

"You made b'lieve be a boy. You cheated me. You are contemptible!" exclaimed the little creature in a sudden rage, as she darted across the room, and sat down in a distant chair with all the *abandon* of a person to whom things are visible.

Mrs. Gould came in directly afterward, and summoned them to the table.

"What," she said, "haven't you made each other's acquaintance yet? This is my son Oliver, my dear,

and all the family I have. This is cousin Naomi, Noll. I hope you will become very good friends."

Naomi rose from her chair, and made a stiff little bow. Noll looked highly amused, as he answered, —

"Oh ! we've had a long conversation : we're getting on famously."

Naomi made no reply : she ate her breakfast in grim silence, declining firmly every thing that Noll passed her.

"Now, Noll," said his mother, when Naomi had left the room, "you have been teasing that child ; and I tell you once for all that I will not allow it."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WRONG PART.

NAOMI'S coming into the family had one important result: it furnished Mrs. Gould with such occupation for her spare time, that she ceased talking of her proposed new charity. Meanwhile the young people were busily rehearsing their play. And it may be doubted if there was ever before a play that needed so much rehearsing, or an intelligent young man of twenty-one that proved so uncommonly dull in the matter of acquiring the French accent; for, on one pretext or the other, Noll now went almost daily to the Houghtons.

Whether Mrs. Gould had forgotten the play, or whether she all the time had a definite purpose with regard to it, did not at first appear. After parrying various questionings of Noll's upon the subject, she one day brought it upon the carpet herself, when Miss Houghton came to call.

"You have come in very opportunely, my dear. I was just thinking of writing you a note."

"Were you? I almost wish I had staid at home."

As Miss Houghton murmured the little compliment, she sank into the nearest low chair in such a dexterous manner that her skirts settled about her like the petals around a rose.

"It will be much better to talk it out, for it involves explanation, apology, and I know not what else."

"Delightful! it sounds interesting already." *

"It's about the play."

"Oh, yes! do you think Ol — that is, Mr. Gould is getting tired of it?"

"I have seen no evidence of it," said Mrs. Gould demurely; "but I have said nothing to him yet: I want to get it settled with you first."

Miss Houghton looked composed but curious.

"The fact is, I have changed my mind a little about it. The scheme for which I wanted to raise funds has become impracticable. Other calls upon my time and attention have intervened, so that I have been obliged to give it up."

"I see; so you will not need the play. Never mind: I'm not a bit disappointed, really and truly I am not," she continued, smiling good-humoredly. "We have had ever so much fun getting it up, and that is the best part of it."

"You are very amiable to try and help me out, my dear; but that is not my plan. I do not want to give it up. We will have it without an object. I will give a reception, and we will have it for diversion."

"Delightful! then we shall not have the tickets to sell, and nobody dare criticise; but suppose Mr. Gould objects to play it just for amusement. He is so — so refractory sometimes. But he needn't know: we will not say any thing to him about it."

"No, no: leave it to me, my dear. I never deceive him," returned Mrs. Gould, looking rather curiously at her visitor.

"Oh! of course not, if you can manage him without," said the latter, tossing up her muff with a silvery laugh.

"We will manage him together. You shall take off your bonnet, and stay to tea, and we will have the rehearsal here this evening."

"But" —

"I will send a note to your mamma, and Noll shall take you home in the evening."

Miss Houghton surrendered her hat and cloak with good grace. Mrs. Gould despatched the note; and the two ladies had scarcely seated themselves to resume their talk, when Noll came in.

His look of pleased surprise on entering the room was not lost on his mother.

"Aren't you astonished to see me?" asked the visitor, extending her hand in smiling languor.

"Immensely."

"You don't seem so a bit."

"My mother taught me in early youth to conceal my feelings: she has Mohawk blood."

"You would do well to remember what your mother really did teach you," interjected Mrs. Gould.

"What do you think *I'm* going to do?" queried the visitor.

"Can't think," said Noll, whose attempt at gravity was rendered futile by the irrepressible gleam of humor in his eyes.

"Stay to tea."

"Dreadful!"

"You inhospitable thing! and then what?"

"Haven't the slightest."

"But you ought to guess."

"Oh! to be sure; let me see! take a nap perhaps."

"No, no! really now."

"Sing?"

"No."

"Play?"

"No."

"Think?"

"I never think: it makes wrinkles. Now you needn't laugh. Susie Dunham is all crow's-feet from thinking so hard over her clothes—but she does have beautiful things."

"Then I give it up."

"How dull of you! I am going to rehearse."

"Alone?"

"No; with you, of course."

"Hm—m; but I am going out."

"No, you cannot; your mother wants to see us."

"I make it a point never to indulge my mother in these foolish little whims."

"But you can't go out, at any rate."

"Why not?"

"You have to take me home: your mother made the engagement."

"Ah! in that case I shall, of course, have to yield."

Mrs. Gould sat by, listening to this froth of conversation with a face whose half-smile served as a mask to the serious study she was making of the pair before her. They made a very pretty picture,—she, seated in her low chair, with soft draperies falling all about, in outline rounded and flowing, in color glowing and tender; he, leaning over, with stalwart form just saved from angularity, with keen face, and vigorous head, furnishing the needed foil of power to her charm of grace.

The two seemed content to leave unsounded all the depths that lay below the shining surface of conversation. Did Noll seem to tire of this thin thread of talk? Not he: his eyes were made the fools o' the other senses, or else, worth all the rest, they were feasting to the full in a rich pasturage of beauty, while he was being helplessly wound and wound about in the toils spread by those busy hands and eyes.

In the midst of it all, the tea-bell rang. Noll gave each lady an arm, and they all went out together.

"Mrs. Gould doesn't have to look up as I do," said Miss Houghton, craning her neck gracefully around to exchange smiles with her hostess across Noll's ample chest.

"No: my mother is very much overgrown; she was not kept properly in check when she was young."

They were already seated when the door opened, and Naomi came in: she went straight to her place at Mrs. Gould's side, and seated herself so quickly that Miss Houghton evidently did not remark her infirmity.

She acknowledged the introduction by a simple bow, and ate her supper in silence, listening intently to the conversation as if trying to make out the new-comer.

"And what have you been doing all day, Miss Dill?" cried Noll presently, with a good-humored intent to include her in the conversation.

"Nothing," she answered shortly.

"Between ourselves, that is a good deal my own case: only I shouldn't think of owning up to it, in that reckless manner."

"How lucky you are here, Miss Dill!" chimed in the visitor, amiably following Noll's lead, "for now you can read one of the parts in our play."

A deep flush swept across Naomi's face. Mrs. Gould instantly interposed, "I will read for you."

"Oh, no! *you* must see it: we want you for audience."

Miss Houghton stopped. A quick glance from mother to son showed her that something was wrong, and she instantly hedged.

"But it isn't necessary, of course, to have any one; and if Miss Dill prefers to look on" —

"I will not be called Miss Dill!" cried Naomi sharply.

"Certainly not: I beg you will excuse me," returned the astonished visitor, with an inquiring glance at her hostess.

Mrs. Gould composedly drank her tea, and took no notice. Her guest instantly took the hint; and, by a dexterous but rather violent turn to the conversation, she went prattling away on some society gossip.

Thanks to her tact, the conversation did not halt; and all went well until the servant in waiting misplaced the cream-pitcher upon the table, putting it between Mrs. Gould and Naomi, where the latter, in passing her cup, presently overturned it. She put her hand out quickly, discovered what she had done, and, bursting into tears, swept away from the table.

Noll looked distressed, and half rose from his seat : a glance from his mother restrained him. Miss Houghton's resources were again called upon : she came straight to the rescue with a timely anecdote, to which Mrs. Gould gave undivided attention, while the servant was mopping up the cream.

Noll's concern for his blind cousin apparently soon gave place to admiration for the excellent good-breeding, self-possession, and amiability with which their visitor had triumphed over all obstacles, and made the meal agreeable despite its *contretemps*.

After tea Mrs. Gould went away to bestow what sympathy and counsel she saw fit upon her young cousin. She came back presently, and the rehearsal began.

"The audience is expected to be enthusiastic," said Noll as he took his place.

The audience was enthusiastic. It laughed and applauded without stint. The leading lady was certainly captivating in her part ; so captivating, in fact, that the leading gentleman continually forgot his own cues, in watching her. Whereupon she lectured him sharply, and said he was not up to himself, and that, if he was so bad as that at the rehearsal, what would he do at the performance ? And so the play went on, interspersed with much discussion, criticism, and hubbub, after the manner of such amateur affairs.

But the audience was not satisfied with one or two scenes : it wanted the rest, and called upon the leading gentleman to take the other lover's part. The leading gentleman assented very cheerfully, saying as he took the book, —

"This is the part I wanted to play from the first."

Whether it was that the leading gentleman said this in a tone of peculiar significance, whether it was that he happened to be looking very nearly and very directly into the leading lady's eyes as he took the book from her hand, or whether it was from some inscruta-

ble reason useless to conjecture, we cannot say ; but the leading lady suddenly blushed deeply, and turned away.

The leading lady was not in the habit of blushing. The leading gentleman may never have seen her blush before. Perhaps that is why he stood gazing at her so curiously and steadfastly, until she recovered her self-possession, and recalled him to the business in hand by exclaiming, —

"Regardez-moi, et répondez-moi bien franchement. Comment me trouvez vous?"

What there was in this slight incident to affect the audience, it would be hard to say ; but the fact remains that it came forward, and, quite contrary to its usual undemonstrative fashion, kissed the leading lady very warmly when the scene was over.

Three weeks passed away. It was just before Mrs. Gould's reception, that Noll came home one evening in a very mysterious mood, to find his mother sitting up for him. He got on his slippers, lit his cigar, and seated himself before the fire with a carefully assumed air of deliberation.

"Queeny," he cried at length.

"Yes."

"Shall I tell you a secret?"

"As you please."

"It's about the play."

"Ah?"

"You know I've all this time been playing the wrong lover."

"I have heard something to that effect."

"Very well, we have changed all that."

"Indeed!"

"I am going to play the other now."

Mrs. Gould looked up inquiringly: her son was gazing with a conscious, half-sheepish air at the fire.

"Do you mean, Noll" —

"I mean that I have been getting along in my French; that I have been going into the grammar; that I have been conjugating verbs."

His mother did not answer. She sat silently regarding him.

"I have been conjugating the verb *aimer*: I have been very busy with the present tense."

"My dear boy," exclaimed Mrs. Gould, rising with a sudden lighting-up of her face, "I am rejoiced to hear it. You have done a very wise thing: you have secured your own happiness and mine."

"What a very enthusiastic, hilarious old lady!" exclaimed Noll, jumping up with a beaming face to receive his mother's caress.

"But," gasped Mrs. Gould as her son waltzed her about the room, "don't spend all your thought on the present-tense! there is another very important tense to be considered."

"Oh, never fear!" cried Noll rapturously: "infinitive mood—future tense. We shall learn that fast enough: we shall always be learning it."

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

BEASTS OF PREY.

FOUR years have rolled away. The great war is over. The grass grows green over thousands of new-made graves. The land is filled with widows and orphans; the streets are thronged with armless and legless men—but what then? A big black blot has been washed out from the national escutcheon, washed out forevermore in blood. The American people is purer politically, and—stay, we had well-nigh added socially. Let us see!

Four years! the social pool has been stirred to its uttermost depths. The dregs float gayly upon the turbid top. Some very queer folks have come into sudden prominence,—folks with big mouths and loud voices, folks bedizened with huge diamonds and fine clothes; whose clothes, be it said, are noticeably better than their faces, or indeed than their manners.

Four years! Old vices have flourished to an appalling degree: brisk new vices have sprung up. Honor and truth have grown a little old-fashioned. Prudence, thrift, economy, and all the old train of domestic virtues, are forgotten weaknesses. Money is abundant, and everybody has enough. Money? Well, paper promises, quite the same thing, which will

buy as fine clothes and diamonds as can be had for English sovereigns.

Four years ! A jackal sits upon the municipal throne of New York, and holds the palsied city under his brutish sway. Wolves, leopards, jaguars, and hyenas fill the minor offices of trust and honor ; and one and all the bestial train rob, plunder, and prey upon the city's vitals, while lizards, reptiles, and nameless noxious things crawl up and down, and in and out of the places of meaner profit, covering with a foul slime of venality every function of government. A supine community looks on in stolid indifference, and beholds the havoc : men here and there murmur feebly and futilely, but none dare raise hand or voice to drive away the ravening horde.

Four years ! The material city still sits as proudly at the head of her magnificent harbor, her steeples rise as grandly to the skies, her flags and streamers wave and flutter as gayly in the ocean breeze, as — as though she were not rotten to her very heart's core with corruption.

From the City Hall to the Court House is but a step. The plunder-seeking horde soon finds the way. They troop thither, they invade the seat of justice, they drag the judicial ermine in the mire, they audaciously usurp the sacred office, and give to gigantic pillage the sanction of the law.

Four years have passed, when, one fine morning, the case of "*Badger against Gould*" appears upon the calendar of the special term of the supreme court. The case has grown respectably aged. It has been through the mysterious and tortuous experience of the chambers of a court referee, to whom years ago it was referred to "find the facts." Presumably the facts have been found ; as, in its slow course, the case has at length re-appeared upon the calendar. The court-room is a big, square, barren chamber, with glaring white walls and heavy iron and black-walnut

trimmings. A large central space is railed off for the members of the bar, directly in front of the judge's seat.

It is nearly nine o'clock. The space within the railing gradually fills up with a motley assemblage of lawyers, managing clerks, and office-boys, some standing, some sitting, some anxiously studying the calendar, some laughing and talking in a low tone. Outside, in the seats set aside for the public, there are a few people, mostly parties interested in the forthcoming cases.

Suddenly there is a slamming of doors, a general bustle, a sharp knock, and a loud cry of "Court!" The bar rises in a body. There is a moment of expectancy, and presently a dark, slender figure comes skipping in, mounts the steps, and shuts itself into the judicial box.

"It is the court!" so says the sheriff's officer, who pounds upon the railing to command silence. So say the fifty, or more, members of the bar, respectfully standing while the figure takes its seat.

But for which assurance we might have doubted: the court's head is so small, its features so insignificant, and its restless black eyes rove over the room with such a familiar and comic expression. The court's dress, too, might naturally have misled us; for the court is attired in a short black-velvet coat, a ruffled shirt studded with huge diamonds, a low waistcoat, and a pink-and-white muslin cravat.

The bar sits; the officer pounds again; the court picks up the printed slip before it, and begins rapidly to call the calendar. As the title of each new case is spoken, two or more attorneys rise, who, after a more or less extended dispute as to the time of trial, agree upon something, and retire. The court meanwhile intersperses a running fire of facetious comment upon the merits of these various disputes, and occasionally makes a happy personal hit that brings down the house.

The call of "Badger *against* Gould" brings Judge Clark and Nicholas Ferrette, Esq., to the front; and, although the latter has been muttering and scowling to Mr. Joe Piverton in the back of the room for the past five minutes, he presents now to the court his old ingratiating smile.

To the surprise of those of his brother attorneys who are acquainted with him, the plaintiff's counsel consents to have the case marked "Ready." Later in the day, when it is taken up for trial, the mystery is explained. The referee's report is in his favor.

The court examines the report when it is handed up with the other papers, and recognizes the signature of its favorite *protégé*,—a man who has grown rich upon such judicial favors. Captious critics in the daily press remark that his Honor seems to keep pace in prosperity with the favored referee, and make awkward comments thereon. But this does not disturb his Honor: he is superior to such petty carping. Now he listens to the report in "Badger *against* Gould." It is a lengthy paper. It takes up a great many pages to set forth the facts it has found: which facts are, in brief, that once upon a time a man by the name of James Gould lived and died; that he left a will; that in said will he gave certain legacies to the plaintiffs; that the defendant was the said Gould's executrix; that she had never paid the said legacies, although she had received sufficient property from the estate to pay the same; that, if the plaintiffs' claim was adjudged just as matter of law, there would now be due them the amount of the legacies, together with interest thereon from one year after the death of the testator; that such sum would amount to one hundred and thirty-nine thousand and eight hundred dollars, calculated up to the date of the report.

His Honor hears the arguments of counsel, and reserves his decision. In two hours it is all over: the lawyers gather up their papers, and withdraw.

As Mr. Ferrette and his managing clerk were about leaving the court-room, a female draped in a long mourning veil approached from the public seats.

"Good-mornin'," she said in a well-remembered voice.

Mr. Ferrette started, repressed a scowl, and answered with a natural surprise, —

"You here?"

"Yes: I thought I'd look in."

"How did you know the case was on?"

"Why, I saw it in the paper: mother'n' I generally read the court news."

Mr. Ferrette regarded his client with suspicion, but made no reply.

"I 'spose you can't tell yet," she continued in a weak voice.

"Tell what?"

"Why, how it's goin' to go."

"No."

"How soon d'you 'spose you will know?"

"Can't say," returned Mr. Ferrette sulkily. "When the judge gets round to it."

"Then there is no use o' my waitin' here to-day, I 'spose?"

"Not the least."

Miss Badger pulled down her long veil, and withdrew. Mr. Ferrette watched her, as she disappeared down the marble staircase, with an indescribable look. One would have been puzzled to say whether it was aversion or defiance.

As for "Badger *against* Gould," the judge got around to it in about two weeks. He filed his decision. He gave judgment for the plaintiff in the full amount. He cited authorities, and gave technical reasons which it is unnecessary to detail. An appeal was taken, and argued before the "General Term." The decision of the lower court was sustained; and soon afterwards final judgment was entered up against the de-

fendant in the above-mentioned amount, plus a very large sum for costs and referee's fees.

And so "Badger *against* Gould" at length made its way through the courts. And so, somehow, and at some time, other public and private business was despatched which did not attract the cupidity nor interfere with the pursuits of the hungry, snarling beasts of prey, whose greedy eyes were watching for the fat spoils of big corporations or public office.

On the eve of the final disposition of the case, the defendant's counsel sat down, and wrote her the following note : —

MY DEAR MADAM, — It is my painful duty to inform you that it is at last all over, and we have lost our case. The General Term affirmed the judgment of the lower court, and judgment was this day entered against you in the county clerk's office.

I hope you will not be entirely unprepared for the announcement, nor for the further intimation that the Damen estate will probably be levied upon at once, and sold at auction. I take this first opportunity to let you know the worst, that you may make your arrangements accordingly. You have my cordial sympathy.

Very respectfully yours,

SAMUEL CLARK.

CHAPTER II.

"UNCLE DICK."

SIX huge wooden Corinthian pillars uphold the roof of Mrs. Gould's portico at her beautiful country home in the Connecticut valley. Behind them; and amongst their slant shadows, she sits one midsummer afternoon, watching the sunset and the silhouettes of the grand old elms thrown eastward on the smooth lawn.

Four years seem to have wrought little change in Mrs. Gould. For all that appears, she might have slept away the time. She may, perhaps, have a few more gray hairs, or an added wrinkle upon her forehead: but we concern ourselves only with what seems; and, for all that seems, Anne Gould is the same woman we knew aforetime, as she sits with a neglected book in her lax hand, looking down the winding avenue towards the gate, or over at a distant stretch of the dusty highway visible through the trees. About her the fluttering awnings, the swaying hammock, the wicker chairs, the venerable lemon-tree in its glazed pot, the quaint china jars, give the porch a comfortable and inviting look. But Mrs. Gould heeds not these: she has an air of musing superposed upon one of expectancy.

The wind rustling in the overhanging leaves, a single cricket chirping in the tall grass, a drowsy bird singing his vesper hymn, a piano inside touched by a skilled hand, do not interrupt Mrs. Gould's musings: they but emphasize the pervading silence. It is only when the piano stops, that she moves uneasily, as though the stillness were broken by a discord,

and regains mental repose not until the music is renewed.

But, yonder, a sudden cloud of dust upon the highway catches her eye. She starts forward in her chair with brightened look, and cries, —

“Here he comes, Naomi!”

The piano stops, and the player comes upon the scene. Time has been busy enough here. The scrawny childish figure has rounded to almost faultless proportions, the face has filled to a delicate oval, the once hanging braids are now piled up in a mass upon the dainty head; and yet the small sharp features wear an expression as alert as aforetime, the little hands are as quick and deft, and with intermittent looks and tones of elegance come by turns the old suggestions of the sprite.

She now came quickly to Mrs. Gould's side, and passed her hand lightly over the latter's hair and neck-gear.

“Am I ship-shape?”

“The wind has tumbled your hair.”

“Never mind, he will never notice it.”

“He has some one with him,” said Naomi, suddenly inclining her head forward. “There are two.”

“Do you hear them already?”

“I hear talking and laughing.”

“Oh! he's talking with Timothy.”

“It is not Timothy.”

“You are right,” exclaimed Mrs. Gould presently, as the carriage turned into the avenue leading to the house. “There *is* somebody: it looks like a woman. Ah! it's Helen.”

“Yes.”

The cold, dry tone of the blind girl was not remarked by Mrs. Gould, who was busy with the approaching carriage.

Directly they came rolling up to the door. Oliver

Gould lifted out his betrothed, who tripped beaming up the steps.

"Now, aren't you astonished?" she cried, embracing Mrs. Gould.

"Not at all," returned the latter cordially: "I always expect you."

"Oh, of course! but, really, I have no business to be here. I ought not to have left mamma: but I couldn't resist. Noll sent up for me this afternoon, just as I came in from a drive. I ate my dinner, packed my bag, and flew away down to the dépôt, and I haven't got over my whirl yet. But am I not looking well? Do say 'yes,' for mamma says I'm getting to be a fright; because—don't tell!—I'm growing stout. I positively dare not weigh myself any longer; and you—why, you really grow younger every time. Now, if you go on at this rate, Noll and I will soon catch up, and then we shall all be old men and women together. Wouldn't it be lovely?"

Mrs. Gould smiled at this pretty prattle, and kissed the speaker again, stretching out a spare hand to the tall figure behind.

"How d'ye do, old lady?"

"Welcome home, boy!"

"And how is Pussy Dill?"

Oliver stepped towards Naomi. She stood quite still, but her face shone with eagerness as she put out her hand. It did not reach its destination; for a little figure ran suddenly in between the two, crying gayly,—

"Stop, stop! she must shake hands with the company first, you know. Where are your manners, big, clumsy boy?"

But Noll was absorbed in noting a sudden change in his cousin's look: an expression of mingled pain and disgust swept, like a flash, across her sensitive face, and she almost recoiled at the touch of the unexpected hand. Was the look a revelation to him? He gazed at her curiously, as, in obedience to Helen's

"Now it is your turn," he advanced to shake hands. The little palm lay cold as a stone in his, and its owner withdrew it quickly and almost haughtily.

"How well you look, Naomi, and how prettily your hair's done! I really don't see how you manage it without a maid."

Did the blind girl detect an air of patronage in these pretty speeches? Did she suspect that her amiable visitor was purposely trying to overwhelm her in the perilous contrast with her own superior charms? Why else did she grow so cold and silent and forbidding?

"And how comes on the music? Making the same wonderful progress as ever? Expect pretty soon you'll develop into a prodigy."

How could so fair a rose of compliment bristle with ugly thorns? How could such seeming fair intent avail to belittle the worth and demean the credit of the one hard-earned accomplishment the blind girl possessed? How? Answer, ye women of smiling looks, silvery tones, and fine-strained mercy!

"You must play to us by and by."

There was no answer.

"Will you not?"

"No."

Mrs. Gould and her son exchanged looks of annoyance at this rude answer.

"All great artists are disobliging," returned the visitor good-humoredly; and, turning to Mrs. Gould, she continued in the easiest manner in the world, —

"You haven't the slightest idea how delighted I am to get out here. The air is so pure, and every thing is so fresh, that I feel like hopping and skipping — like jumping over things. — Come, Noll, let's go and have a run on the lawn. Excuse us, we will not go far," she cried, calling back merrily as they ran down the steps.

Mrs. Gould with pleased eyes watched the pair run across the lawn and disappear behind the trees. Turn-

ing, she saw Naomi sitting like a statue, with her ever-active hands dropped in her lap.

"Why did you refuse to play for Helen?" she inquired.

"You have no right to ask me that," returned the girl with flushed face.

"True, I have not; but I have a right to complain when you are rude to my guests," said Mrs. Gould a little coldly.

"Why do they not leave me alone? Do I interfere with them?"

"Helen was very sweet to you: she wanted to pay you a compliment, and you insulted her."

Naomi repressed the bitterness that for an instant contorted her features, and said with a sudden hardness, —

"Do you order me to play to her?"

"'Order' you, child! You are in a strange mood to-night."

"Yes. I have no sweet manners: I am not amiable."

Mrs. Gould looked keenly at the pale, perturbed face, and said no more. Naomi stood a moment, expecting her to speak. The silence, however she interpreted it, affected her more keenly than the sharpest reproof. Turning like a flash she flung herself upon the floor, seized her friend's hand, and kissed it vehemently, crying with a great sob, —

"Cousin, cousin, don't be angry, forgive me!"

"There, there, control yourself!" said Mrs. Gould, a little impatiently. "You had better go to your own room for a while."

The blind girl rose instantly, cold as a stone, and disappeared through the open window.

The two young people came back glowing with their exercise. The tea-bell rang soon after; and the family assembled anon in the cool old-fashioned eating-room, where the visitor's buoyant spirits and varied

piquant talk made the meal gay and pleasant despite the chilling silence of Naomi.

"By the way, Queeny," cried Noll, handing his mother a package of letters as they rose from the table, "here is your evening's mail: I had nearly forgotten it."

"And a letter from Dick too, you careless boy. Excuse me, my dear, this is from my brother," said Mrs. Gould, breaking the seal of the uppermost letter. "He must have landed — yes," she continued, reading eagerly, "he has arrived all safe and sound, and will be here — I declare — this very night! Noll, do you hear? That is good news indeed! This seems a day for a white stone; two such pleasant surprises, — your coming, Helen, and now this news from Dick."

Mrs. Gould opened the second letter, and her face presently fell. She looked up suddenly, and said, "But you have all finished. Don't wait for me, please. I will join you directly on the porch."

The three young people rose, and left Mrs. Gould to her letters. Noll in a half-rollicking way drew Naomi's hand through his arm, and thus forced her to make one of the party as they withdrew. He held her in conversation after they had taken their seats outside, while Helen ran away to the flower-beds, and came back presently with her head and neck decked with blossoms.

"See, this spray of fuchsias is just what I wanted for my hair: isn't it becoming?"

She turned her head to show the cluster of dark purple flowers mingling with her shining braids. Noll nodded with silent admiration.

"But what do you know about it, goosey-gander?" she continued, coming up, throwing herself upon a stool beside him, and looking archly up into his face. "How many times must I tell you to stop making that deep, ugly line between your eyes?" she went on, smoothing away the wrinkles with busy hand. "You

frown all the time nowadays. What is there in the world that needs so much frowning about — eh?"

"Sham and humbug."

"Pooh! What have you to do with sham and humbug?" she asked, taking hold of his bony wrists, and striking his big hands softly together.

"Fight them."

"But where do you find them?"

"In men and women."

"Who?"

"Every one."

"Then you are a humbug yourself?"

"Of course!"

A gleam of his old playfulness broke for a minute through Noll's now habitually grave and pre-occupied mien as he responded to this cross-questioning, and he laughed outright at the last query.

"Well, but I?"

"You? Oh! you are a very curious young woman," he said, taking her head between his hands, and kissing her smooth forehead.

"Noll!"

It was his mother calling from within: her tone seemed unusually sharp and imperative.

"Ay, ay, Queeny."

"Come here! I have some news for you."

"Don't stay long: remember I'm out here all alone!" whispered Helen as he rose to go.

During this little talk Naomi had quietly slipped into the parlor, where she was now heard at the piano.

"There, you're all right now. Listen to Pussy Dill: she is going to give you some music."

Pussy Dill's music, it may be said, was worth listening to; it was in many respects remarkable; she played with the sincerity, the fervor, the intensity, of one who found in music a medium of expression for a store of thought and passion else unformulated. She began now in a cold, listless, halting mood; she was

self-conscious ; this soon passed away, and the world and its interests were wholly forgotten. An hour elapsed, she suddenly stopped ; silence reigned through the house, save for the murmur of voices from the distant library where Mrs. Gould and her son were still closeted. But stay : the quick ear of the musician has caught another sound, a low measured breathing outside the window. A sudden impulse seemed to seize her : she rose quickly, hesitated a moment, then stole softly out upon the porch, and bent over the sleeper. Presently she put out her hand, and gently touched the graceful head, examined minutely the arrangement of the hair, and passed her light fingers down upon the face. The sleeper stirred. The blind girl started back like a detected thief ; but presently, as if drawn by an irresistible impulse, resumed her examination. Carefully, critically, each feature was passed over again and again, as if to correct or confirm the first impression. Then the busy hand swept down upon the dress, and over each dainty detail of the toilet.

She was at length interrupted by the sound of wheels coming up the avenue. She retreated quickly. Helen started up, and cried aloud. Noll and his mother came hastening out upon the porch.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, I have had a dreadful dream!"

"Careless girl," chided Mrs. Gould; "to go to sleep out here in the damp night air!"

"But there was nobody to talk to."

"Where was Naomi?"

"I was playing," responded the latter with peculiar emphasis.

"Oh, yes, to be sure! I heard you. Thank you, my dear — but who is this, Noll, driving up the avenue?"

"Uncle Dick."

CHAPTER III.

"LOOK WHERE IT COMES AGAIN!"

COL. RICHARD GOULD arrived home after several years absence in Europe, just in time for a family consultation.

Standing in the midst of the little group on the porch, as the light streamed upon him from the great parlor-windows, he appeared to be a man in the prime of life, with a soldierly bearing, and a face whose severe gravity was only saved from sternness by a promise of tenderness in his fiery brown eyes. He was evidently no waster of words. He responded quietly to the cordial greetings of his nephew and sister-in-law, saluted the young ladies with formal courtesy, and listened with polite patience to Helen's lively salutation.

"I am the new member of the family, Col. Gould. I hope at last we shall get acquainted; and I hope for Noll's sake," she continued archly, "that you will approve of me. You ran away to Europe so soon after the war, and staid so long, that I began to despair of ever meeting you. Aren't you glad to get home?"

"Very glad, thank you."

"But already just a very little homesick for Europe?"

"Not at all."

"Oh! it's too soon yet: that will come by and by. It's very stupid here for a man after living abroad. Perhaps it's because everybody knows him, and he cannot do as he likes without being talked about."

Col. Gould's silent bow rather disconcerted Helen. She seemed at a loss how to go on. The colonel

waited several moments for her to continue, and then turned to his sister-in-law.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed the latter heartily, "this is like old times, indeed, Dick. But first let us attend to the inner man. Have you had your supper?"

"Thank you, yes."

"Can I do any thing for your comfort?"

"Nothing at all."

"Sit down, then, and let us talk. I'm not going to make you tell about your travels to-night. I'm too glad to get you back. I want to see you a bit; but you look so well, we needn't ask after your health."

"I am well."

"What a time you've been gone, and how many things have happened! Do you not find us altered?"

"How?"

"Why, Noll has grown big, and I have grown old; and we've both grown sour, I fear."

"So far as I can make out in this light," returned the colonel, hesitating, "it is the other way: it is you"—

"Who have grown big: fie, that is rather a left-handed compliment," said Mrs. Gould, laughing. "But perhaps you're right: Noll is getting sedate, and I have been obliged to let out one or two of my dresses."

"Pooh!" interposed Noll, starting out of a little reverie, "it sounds well for you two dotards to be calling me old. As for you, veteran," he continued, patting his uncle familiarly upon the shoulder, "you are precisely the same old two-and-sixpence, save that you have a comical foreign twist about you somewhere; and I've been trying to make out whether it is in your moustache, your neck-tie, or the cut of your coat-tail."

"And you," returned the uncle with a momentary smile, "have not forgotten your waggery, it seems. "But truly, Anne," he continued, turning again to her, "I am glad to see you both looking so well; and how does the world use you?"

Noll changed countenance at this question, and Mrs. Gould paused for several moments before replying.

"Why, I have kept you pretty well posted about our affairs. We've neither grown rich nor famous."

The colonel evidently noted the guarded tone of his sister-in-law's answer; for he turned about abruptly, and began asking Noll about his business. Naomi interrupted them presently by rising to say good-night. As she advanced for a moment into the light, the colonel remarked the extraordinary change in her looks, and commented upon it after she withdrew.

But the colonel was having all the talk to himself. His nephew and sister-in-law, despite their pleasure in seeing him, were strangely pre-occupied, and lent but a forced attention. The conversation dragged painfully. Helen saw that the situation was embarrassed by her presence, and, with excellent judgment, rose to retire. Mrs. Gould almost made the mistake of thanking her. As it was, she more than half apologized for not urging her to stay.

"You are tired, my dear, and will be better off in bed: besides, we have some tedious business to discuss."

"Good-night, colonel: we'll get acquainted to-morrow!" cried the young lady gayly, as she disappeared through the fluttering lace drapery of the window.

"So," said Mrs. Gould, drawing up her chair to form with the others a confidential triangle, "it seems good to get together again. Dick, where are your traps?"

"Left them in town."

"You must bring them down, and stay with us. Don't think of hunting up quarters in town this summer: you'll be more comfortable here; your old room is just as you left it, and all ready for you."

"Thank you, perhaps I will; but I fear I shall plague you, for I keep very irregular hours."

"Oh! suit yourself: do as you please, and I will make you as comfortable as I can."

"And how about the great lawsuit?" asked the colonel, choosing a cigar from Noll's proffered case.

"Why, you're lucky, uncle Dick," said Noll with a queer little laugh, "you're in at the death."

"Finished?"

"Yes."

"And you won?"

"No, Dick: we were beaten," interposed Mrs. Gould.

"Whew!" whistled the colonel. "Is there no appeal?"

"Yes, there is the Court of Appeals, but I shall not trouble it. I shall carry it no farther. I have had enough of their courts. Every thing is done by machinery: intelligence is left entirely out of the question. Some commonplace fellow is made a judge by his political party: he pronounces a decision which the next judge who has a similar case thinks himself obliged to stand by, though the heavens fall, quite regardless of the consideration that he may thereby perpetuate a mistake."

"Mamma is satirical, and consequently unfair. It is a beautiful system," said Noll with grave irony: "that is the way that eminent legal wisdom becomes crystallized into law."

"Pooh, pooh, Dick!" continued Mrs. Gould impatiently, "if you have any post-mortem arrangements to make, any thing to leave behind which you want disposed of in a certain way, do it yourself! Distribute it before you die, with your own hands: Make no will to be misconstrued by these hair-splitting courts."

"Your experience is certainly a warning."

"Yes; and I'm tempted to publish it for the benefit and instruction of the public. That a great community which, in most other respects, has good common

sense, should submit to such mummary in serious matters touching their lives and welfares, is something I would not have believed if I had not been through this experience. A farce is certainly a respectable name for this whole long four-year proceeding. There has been no step in it that has not been marked by senseless precedent and arrant folly. Such is law and equity in this happy land!"

"What is the amount of the judgment?" asked the colonel quietly.

"In round numbers, a hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"Good heavens!" he cried in a startled voice. "Are you serious?"

"I have reason enough to be."

"Why," continued the colonel, hesitating, "it will impoverish you. How do you purpose raising such a sum?"

"I do not purpose raising it at all. I do not purpose raising my finger. There is Damen's: let them take and sell it."

"That will give the poor ghost an outing," said Noll idly. "Those vampires will make short work of him. I wish he would but pluck up a ghostly spirit, and haunt them out of it!"

"It's more likely he will go on haunting us," returned Mrs. Gould, falling in with her son's conceit in the very midst of her indignation. "But," she continued, "Damen's may not satisfy them; put up at a forced sale in this manner, I don't expect it will bring such a sum; if not, then this house must go, and my little investments. I am prepared for any thing."

There was a dead silence for several minutes. Noll sat with half-shut eyes and pursed-up lips, regarding his mother, and evidently thinking of the startling words she had just spoken. The colonel puffed fiercely at his cigar, enveloping himself in a cloud of smoke.

"It's a burning shame!" he cried at length, jump-

ing from his seat, and pacing up and down the porch, — “an outrage ; a crying scandal upon the name of justice. But don't stop here, Anne ! If there's another court, take it up ! Every chance is worth trying in such a case. There may be some one in that tribunal who will see the iniquity of such a robbery.”

“No, Dick,” said Mrs. Gould in a quieter tone, as if comforted by her brother's sympathy. “I've taken my turn at scolding, and I've got through. I've got through having any hopes of that kind. Iniquity is a feeble word against precedent. That bugbear holds these honorable creatures in an iron clutch. They shake and tremble before it. They eagerly abjure every right to private judgment, to any honest intellectual conviction, the moment they step into that box they call ‘the bench ;’ and they unhesitatingly sacrifice honor, truth, justice, every dictate of reason or conscience, upon the altar of this airy nothing, of this blind, deaf, insensate idol before which they bow.”

“It's useless to ask what you are going to do,” pursued the colonel. “You can do nothing yet but wait.”

“Why, Noll and I were talking it over when you came. We only learned the news this evening.”

“Indeed ! so lately ?”

“Yes ; and I have made up my mind to anticipate the inevitable,” returned Mrs. Gould stoutly. “I shall send a circular-letter to all the tenants, telling them the state of the case. I shall then at once reduce my establishment here, sell the horses, send away everybody but the stable-boy and the cook, and in every way trim sail as closely as possible.”

“It's cursed — hard — cruel — luck,” muttered the colonel, realizing the picture his sister was painting, as he paced slowly back and forth. “It'll be a horrible grind to you, — this pinching life : you are not used to it.”

"Oh ! I care nothing for all that ; the privation will be a trifling evil," returned Mrs. Gould proudly. " Indeed, I do not think of myself in connection with it. It is not for my own sake. I'm an old woman, and it doesn't matter. It's for " —

She stopped, and nodded towards her son, who for several minutes had taken no part in the conversation, but sat a little apart, absorbed in his own reflections, and softly whistling as he looked out upon the moonlit lawn.

It is uncertain, whether or not he heard this reference to himself ; but, by chance or design, he rose at this moment, and, strolling down the gravel-path, was soon lost in the dense shadows of the trees.

An hour after, when he came in, the lights were out, the porch deserted, and the house shut up. He went directly to his own room, flung himself down in the wide window-seat, and leaned out to catch the cool night breeze. Presently there was a tap at the door, and his mother entered the room. She came and sat down beside him. She put out no caressing hand. She did not sigh or groan, or soften her rich, firm voice. She sat with folded arms, and quietly talked to him, as she had sat in the same place and talked to him a thousand times before.

" Well, boy, this alters the outlook somewhat."

" Yes."

" Poverty will have no romance for either of us : we need not expect it."

" It'll have all it has for any one, I fancy."

" I don't know : there are sentimental folks who affect to find compensations in it."

" Yes, when it's a matter of Hobson's choice."

" I hope, at any rate, we shall endure its privations without adopting its cant. No spasm of resignation shall ever make me say that I am *satisfied* to live in a poor house, and eat at a poor table, when I am de-

prived of better for no fault of my own. But I came in here to-night to have an understanding with you at the outset; to tell you that this blow is not going to crush me. I shall hardly feel it for myself; so what I want to say is: Don't think of me in connection with it! Don't fret one minute for me: so, if that forms any part of the load of your disappointment, you can throw it off now and here."

"I knew I could count upon you, old lady. I have not had a misgiving about it."

"You can, even if it comes to a matter of bread-and-butter. I have no fear but that I have wit and strength enough yet to make my way."

"So it's I who am to be the cry-baby."

"There is to be no cry-baby about it. I should indeed have a poor opinion of you if I thought you had not stuff enough to weather this storm."

"I shall weather it; but," continued Noll with a sudden change of tone, "I do not deny that it has terrors for me."

"You are thinking of Helen. You need have no fears of her."

"I am not sure," he said doubtfully, after a little silence.

"Let me assure you, then. I know I am not mistaken in her. It is idle to say that it will not be a shock, a disappointment; but I know her. She will not be wanting to the emergency, and she will be true to you as never before."

"I have no right to expect or ask it of her."

"Right to expect! right to ask! what nonsense you are talking! Helen is no stranger: she has taken you, as you have taken her, for better or worse. You have a right to expect and ask of her the uttermost degree of patience and consideration of which she is capable."

"It's rather a sorry outcome, after four years waiting, to find that she has been waiting for a beggar at last."

"The waiting was against my advice: it was dictated by your own pride. If you had been married two or three years ago, this would have been regarded but as one of the inevitable ups and downs of life."

"I can only thank God that I was not married then."

Mrs. Gould leaned her arm upon the window-sill beside her son's, and said with an earnestness that approached solemnity, —

"Noll, this is what I feared: this is what I came to warn you against. You are taking a wrong and perverted view of this whole question. This matter of fortune is an important one, I do not deny. You know very well that I never affected to despise or underrate it; but, my dear boy, it is not all! It is not even the chief thing to be considered. Its loss can be repaired by intelligence and industry. Your value as an individual is unimpaired. Think of this; make no rash resolve; take no hasty step: I beseech you, I warn you, as you prize your mother's love and happiness!"

CHAPTER IV.

A CONSULTATION.

"WHO is it?" asked Joe, as a footstep was heard outside in the hall.

"Number five," said Popsy, looking through the open door.

"Number five?" repeated Mr. Piverton, with a rising inflection as he went on with his work.

"V., of course; V. B., algebraically the fifth power of B: it ought to be the hundredth horse-power."

"Oh, the fair Volumnia!"

"The same; the bewitching Badger, the conquering hero; she comes to gather in the trophies of victory."

"She's welcome to the trophies; but Old Nick'll take the spoils."

"How much'll she get, d'you s'pose?"

"Whatever he condescends to leave her."

"Is Mr. Ferrette in?"

These tenuous accents called forth an office smile and a respectful nod from each of the busy clerks, while the junior, officiously opening the door of the retiring-room, called out, —

"Walk right in, Miss Badger: he'll see *you*."

"Ah, good-morning!" said Mr. Ferrette, coming forward with his widest smile. "What do you say now? Great victory, wasn't it?"

"I s'pose so," returned Miss Badger, calmly taking her accustomed seat.

"It's magnificent; it's the biggest judgment recovered in any New-York court for years," continued the delighted attorney, throwing himself back in his large office-chair in a diffusive manner.

"It's a good deal of money," said Miss Badger, arranging her lips with irrepressible satisfaction; "but we hain't got it yet, an' it doesn't seem's though we's ever goin' to."

"No danger about that now."

"How long'll it be?"

"The execution is returnable in sixty days."

"That's two months more."

"Oh, that's nothing, now that we're sure of it!"

"Wall, I s'pose we *can* wait: we've got sort o' used to it."

Miss Badger pronounced the last words resignedly, smoothed back an imaginary lock of hair, and busied herself picking some pieces of lint from her black dress, listening unmoved to the enthusiastic congratulations of her counsel, whose success seemed to have transported him for the moment into a certain atmosphere of magnanimity.

"Wait? we can afford to wait!" he cried, smiling and rubbing his hands: "it's worth waiting for. The fight is over at last. We've got the thing in our own hands. We ought to congratulate ourselves; we ought to have a bonfire. That was a great case; it was a hard fight, too, — a tremendous fight!"

"Was it?"

"Was it?" repeated Mr. Ferrette, with a look of indignation at his client. "You know it was; a devilish hard fight. I never had such a case. It took first-class skill and experience to handle those fellows: they knew what they were about; they didn't leave a stone unturned. It was a hand-to-hand fight, a tooth-and-nail fight. I had to watch them too, watch them like a lynx: they were as tricky as the devil."

"It took a long time, but" —

"Time? of course it did: they fought every inch of the ground."

"But," continued Miss Badger, in a tone of cool disparagement, "I didn't see any thing very hard about it."

Mr. Ferrette bit his lip, and seemed, for a moment, unable to speak from mere exasperation. Miss Badger, wetting her finger, and industriously rolling up a long piece of lint, seemed quite unconscious of having given offence.

"You didn't see any thing hard!" he burst out. "What did *you* know about it? I had to work like a dog over that case. Night after night I've laid awake plotting and planning how to beat them: I never worked over a case so before. I never had a case take hold of me so; I've lost strength, health, and youth over it."

"I shouldn't notice it," said Miss Badger, surveying her counsel deliberately.

"But I was bound to win, and I did. They were a sharp set on the other side: they worked like tigers. That woman is the devil to fight."

"They say she's rather set."

"Miss Badger, you haven't any idea," continued Mr. Ferrette, leaning forward, and assuming his confidential tone, — "you haven't the least idea, my good woman, of the amount of work I did in this business. Why, everybody is talking about it. The referee himself met me on the street the other day, and said he had never seen a case better tried. Now, suppose you had got an ordinary lawyer to take hold of it!"

"Yes, I s'pose you're a great lawyer."

If one could have seen the speaker's face without hearing her tone, or could have heard her tone without seeing her face, he might have thought this entirely sincere. •Mr. Ferrette both saw and heard; and Mr. Ferrette blushed to the roots of his hair.

"Two months more," continued Miss Badger reflectively, looking constantly at her counsel with a pre-occupied air, as if unaware of his embarrassment, "then what shall we have to do?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? oh!"

"We have nothing more to do."

"But the man, the sheriff, what will he do?"

"Sell the property at auction, and give a deed of it."

"And then will he" —

"Eh?"

"Will he pay me the money then?"

Mr. Ferrette hesitated a moment before answering, —

"He will hand us over the amount of the judgment, and if there's any thing more he will give the balance to the defendants."

"He'll pay it in a check, I s'pose?"

"Yes."

"Shall I have to be there to get the money?"

"Where?"

"At the sale."

Mr. Ferrette cast a quick, sidelong glance at his client: she was leaning one elbow on the table, watching him intently, the iris of her pale eyes momentarily contracting.

"Oh, no!" he said, with a sudden smile and a light wave of his hand. "I will attend to that: I will get it, and hand it to you."

"Oh!"

"No, Miss Badger," he continued with another wider and more re-assuring smile. "I am happy to say that all your anxiety and trouble are now at an end. The battle is fought and won. You have stuck by the ship nobly. You haven't shown the white feather once, and that is a good deal to say of a client for whom one has worked year after year as I have for you."

If Miss Badger was impressed by this dexterous compliment, she dissembled masterfully. Smoothing back a stray lock with her long white finger, she asked coolly, —

"Have you made out your bill yet, Mr. Ferrette?"

A dark look swept like a cloud over the attorney's

face; in a moment it vanished, and he met his client's inquiring glance with clumsily-assumed non-chalance.

"Bill? Ha, eh — bill for what?"

"Your bill to us in the case."

Mr. Ferrette studied the serene mask of his client with suspicious care before answering, —

"Ah, no! I haven't thought of that yet."

"Well, would it be too much trouble for you to make it out to-day?"

"Yes — no — that is, I can't do it!"

"Mother'n and I thought we'd like to know."

Nothing could have been more nervelessly limp than Miss Badger's manner, nothing more meekly flat than her voice, yet the growing agitation of her counsel was apparent.

"Ah, well!" he continued, smiling with increasing difficulty. "Sorry I can't oblige you, but the account, you see, extends over a period of nearly four years, covering a great many items: it would take a long time to transcribe it."

"Oh!"

"The fact is, I've been so busy with the case, and with our victory, that — ha, ha! — I never once thought of the bill."

"I s'pose so."

"Time enough for that: there is no hurry. Why not wait till we get through?"

"Could you give us any idea about what it'll be?"

"No-o; without going over my books, I don't think I could."

"I s'pose it'll be pretty large?"

Mr. Ferrette, busied with some papers upon his desk, neglected the interrogation-point in his client's conjecture.

"Of course we expect to pay you something handsome: p'r'aps it'll be two or three thousand dollars?"

"Hm-m — I should think very likely."

Mr. Ferrette moved uneasily in his chair, and looked at his watch.

"Perhaps it'll be as high as seven or eight," continued Miss Badger, studying her counsel's face with intense interest, "or p'raps even ten: mother said it couldn't possibly be *that*; but then we agreed to give you something extry, an' I want to do as we agreed."

"I couldn't really say," cried Mr. Ferrette, starting nervously from his seat, and going to a small closet in the corner of the room. "Sorry to interrupt you, but I have an important appointment at this hour, and must go."

Mr. Ferrette was several minutes in the closet, putting on his hat and coat; when he emerged, his face had settled into a sullen scowl.

"Well," said Miss Badger resignedly, "I s'pose I can call again."

Mr. Ferrette made no answer.

"When do you think you could 'tend to it?"

"Miss Badger, I say to you again, it will be impossible to tell you any thing about it," said the lawyer, sharply turning upon her.

"Oh!"

Miss Badger retreated a step before this sudden explosion of her counsel, but with unimpaired composure.

"We are very much driven at present: my clerks are very busy, and I have no time to do it myself."

"If you thought you could do it to-morrow, it would be just as well: I could drop around in the afternoon."

"I can't do it, I tell you."

"Well, then, I'll leave it till the end of the week."

"Leave it, and be" —

Mr. Ferrette checked himself. His face changed like a flash. With a sudden smile he answered, as he opened the door for his client to pass out, —

"Do : we will try and be ready for you. — Piverton," he continued as they passed through the outer room, "make up the account in 'Badger *against* Gould' at your earliest convenience."

Miss Badger did not see Mr. Piverton wink, or Popsy thrust his tongue into his cheek, as their employer shut the door. If she had, she might not have known what they meant.

CHAPTER V.

A MOONLIGHT TALK.

SUNDAY morning dawned cloudless in the Connecticut valley. Helen came down early, rustling and fluttering through the long parlors, in her cool summer draperies, and out upon the shaded porch where the colonel was already pacing up and down.

"What a model man!" she cried gayly, as they exchanged greetings: "Noll will not be up for an hour yet."

"And do you judge the rest of mankind, Miss Houghton, by that lazy boy?"

"No; but I thought all men were inclined to be sluggards."

"That shows the difference in our experience. I should have said late-rising was the prerogative of women."

"The prerogative, it may be, but not the practice. Women, I think, are mostly like the birds: they like to be up singing and hopping about when the weather is fine. But isn't it queer to get back home?"

"Queer?" repeated the colonel, weighing the word.

"Yes: doesn't every thing seem a little changed, not just the same as it used to be, — a little disappointing perhaps?"

"No."

"Oh! that's because you are so literal and practical, — because you haven't been reproducing things all the time in your imagination."

"Perhaps."

"How delightful it must be to go through life, taking every thing as it comes; never expecting this, that,

or the other, and so never being astonished or disappointed !”

The colonel evidently thought this reflection too trite for approval or too inconsiderable for contradiction, for he said nothing.

“Of course, then, you can never be unhappy,” pursued Helen, studying the dark, severe face of her companion as she paced up and down by his side.

He turned a meditative glance upon her before answering, as if trying to recall what she had been talking about.

“I don't know what I have said, from which you could draw such an inference,” he returned at length. “I must have been misrepresenting myself.”

“Oh ! then, I'm so sorry I made you explain,” she cried, breaking a spray of honeysuckle from a neighboring vine, and fastening it in her belt : “I hoped, for a moment, that I had at last found one human being who was never unhappy.”

The colonel looked critically at his prospective relative, as her head was bent in the adjustment of the flower. Her pose could not have been improved in point of grace : she maintained it unnecessarily long. Whether she was conscious of his scrutiny, is a question beyond human determination.

“How delightful it would be to find one, wouldn't it ?” she exclaimed, looking up with an expression of enthusiasm.

“Such a human being,” returned the colonel absently, with the air of one pursuing a conversation in which he takes no interest ; “would never care to leave this world, I fear.”

“Oh, yes ! he might be perfectly happy here, and yet he might like to go to heaven for a change.”

The colonel suddenly laughed outright.

“That was a serious remark. Do you think it's fair to laugh ?” asked Helen, with a look of demure

gratification at the headway she was making with the new member of the family.

"No ; and I sincerely beg your pardon," said the colonel, with recovered gravity.

"But was what I said so absurd?"

"It was unexpected."

"I suspect you of quizzing me."

"I am sorry you think me capable of such rudeness."

Helen was evidently taken aback by the quiet dignity of this response. Before she could cast about for a rejoinder, they were summoned to breakfast ; and she told Noll later, on the way to church, that she was afraid she should never get along with uncle Dick, and that she was sure he disliked her already.

As for uncle Dick, he seemed indifferent as to what impression he created. Occupied with his sister-in-law and the unhappy state of her affairs, he spent most of the day in talk with her. After dinner they repaired to the library : Naomi retired to some favorite haunt of her own, and Noll and Helen had the porch to themselves.

"Noll," she asked, sitting down by his side, "what makes you so glum?"

"Growing old."

"Pooh !" she cried, suddenly, laying aside her playful manner, and assuming a look at once shrewd and searching. "Noll, you always trifle with me : you never give me true reasons."

"How now, Mignon?"

"You have no right to keep every thing from me as though I had no sense or discretion."

"My dear, I consider you a prodigy of sense and discretion."

"Stop ! no, you do not. There you go on, in the same old way."

"What do you want to know?" he asked, looking at her curiously.

"What makes you so absent-minded and solemn?"

"Am I solemn?"

"You're a very owl; and it's growing worse and worse. You never laugh; you seldom smile. You were not so in the old times: you used to be very gay, but now you are the sourest-looking young man I ever saw."

"So, so," he said, still intently regarding the fair, upturned face, but rather as though busied with some reflection of his own than listening to her words.

"Yes; and when I hear it remarked that all this change has come over you since our engagement, you can imagine it is not very pleasant."

"But what good would it do you to hear a lot of business perplexities?"

"Better to know what's the matter, than perpetually to wonder and fret about it."

"Does my Mignon fret?" asked Noll, putting his arm about her with sudden tenderness.

"How can I help it, when I see you going about with a big, ugly wrinkle between your eyes, as grave as a churchyard? Do you think I am blind, or a dunce? You come to see me, but it doesn't seem to make you happy: you put your arm about me as if I were a parcel, and in five minutes forget I am there."

She stopped twisting the button of his coat with which she had been busy, and looked up half-pettishly in his face. He was still gazing intently at her.

"My dear," he said, after a little pause, "one of these days I will make a clean breast of it." He kissed her softly, then suddenly rose, lit a cigar, and sauntered off towards the stables.

After tea Mrs. Gould and Helen went strolling in the garden. Naomi betook herself to the piano; while the colonel fell to chatting with Noll about his life in the East, over their cigars. Presently some callers arrived; and Mrs. Gould, not wishing to bore

the colonel with an introduction, sent Helen to entertain him.

"Noll, your mother wants you to go and help her receive the company; and I am sent to entertain the colonel meanwhile."

"I fear Mrs. Gould has given you an onerous task," said the colonel, throwing away his cigar, and resuming his formal manner.

"Why? Are you hard to entertain?"

"I don't know: I suppose I cannot judge of that" said the colonel, looking a little bored.

"But I expect you to entertain me."

"I will do what I can."

"Why don't you go right on talking to me, as you did to Noll?"

"You might not be interested," returned the colonel, betrayed into a half-smile at the *naïveté* of this question.

"Oh, yes, I should! You ought to give me the benefit of the doubt, at any rate. What were you talking about?"

"Turkish misrule in Syria."

"Every thing. Turkish makes me think of the 'Arabian Nights.' Is it any thing like the 'Arabian Nights'?"

"No; very little."

"Well, it doesn't *sound* very interesting; but it may be. Please go on, and talk some. What did you say last?"

"We were saying," returned the colonel, with an amused look, "that it is doubtful if Syria has ever known a good government; that under Assyrian, Persian, Greek, or Roman domination, things were not much better."

"Did Noll know about that?"

"Yes: he said something which suggested my remark."

"I wonder how he found it out."

At this moment Noll came, bringing over one of the callers, — a Professor Somebody, whose name he did not pronounce distinctly, — the master of a neighboring seminary.

The professor was a little man, with an instructive manner. He had evidently not lived enough out of his school atmosphere to rub off or modify his dogmatism, which seemed inveterate. Being, moreover, loquacious, and not very acute of perception, he was not the best social material. He came over to ask the colonel some questions about the East, but presently began to be instructive. The colonel, who evidently looked upon his interlocutor from the first with the more or less disguised contempt which the soldier too often entertains for the scholar, was rapidly coming to regard him as a bore, and to treat him with a *hauteur* of which the other was happily oblivious, when Helen opportunely returned. One minute's patient audience made her mistress of the whole situation.

"What, professor!" she cried pleasantly, "do you know about the East too?"

"Oh, yes! I have studied Oriental life and history a good deal."

"You wonderful man! I know you must have been born with some of these things already in your head; you never could have had time to learn them all: but now you must come straight with me, and tell that last story to Mrs. Gould; we are missing all these fine things at our end of the porch."

The professor was not different from other professors, from other statesmen, scholars, soldiers, etc.: he swallowed the compliment, as we have all seen men and women, variously great, swallow compliments not a whit less bald, — swallowed it with avidity, as he cried, —

"Ah! I fear you flatter me, Miss Houghton. I shall be delighted to come; excuse me but a moment. You see, sir," he continued, turning to the

colonel, whose nervous irritation was growing more and more apparent, "this is a proof of what I was saying: you cannot deny" —

"Oh! but really, now, I cannot allow you a single word more," interrupted Helen with a bewitching smile. "You will get into another deep discussion, forget the story, and neglect my invitation, which I should never forgive."

"You see, the West has its tyrants as well as the East, colonel, so we shall have to defer our talk," said the little man, rising gallantly, and offering his arm.

Thus Helen victoriously convoyed him across the porch, and returned presently to the colonel.

"Will you do me a favor?" she asked, taking a seat near him.

"Certainly," he said, not yet recovered from his admiration at the adroit way in which she had rid him of his opponent.

"Please smoke a cigar."

"Why do you ask?"

"Because," she said, hesitating, "I like the fragrance out of doors, and because there is a harmless theory, which it is just as well to encourage, that it drives away the mosquitoes."

"I should be selfish to deny you so simple a gratification," said the colonel, drawing a cigar from his pocket, with an expression which showed that he was not the dupe of the artifice.

"How much more delightful every thing is in the twilight!" she continued in bell-like tones, as she studied the sunset sky.

"Why?" asked the colonel, idly blowing away a cloud of smoke.

"Oh, the lights are so pleasant! look at that yellow after-glow in the horizon, and this bit of rose pink overhead! Then the coolness and the quiet, it quite makes up for the day."

"But such a day as this has been needs no compensation."

"You think not until it is gone : but one has to be always doing things in the daytime ; one cannot sit idle, in America, with an easy conscience. Then the broad light is so trying to the complexion ; but I forgot," she said, looking up quickly, and catching the amused look on her companion's face : "men don't have complexions."

The colonel made no reply, but regarded his fair companion with a look whose growing interest showed that he was beginning to discover in her a social value. It may be that the look was not lost on her.

"But, fine as the twilight is, the moonlight is finer," she continued, averting her eyes : "it hides all the ugliness in people and things, and leaves our imagination to heighten their beauties. Then, too, it is such a time to talk."

"If one has a good voice," said the colonel significantly, as he filiped the ashes from his cigar.

"Oh, yes !" she went purling on with the cadence of a lullaby ; "but did you ever think, apropos of voices, how many sounds we hear even in what we call silence ? This seems quiet here, for instance ; we should call it silence in the city : and yet shut your eyes, and listen to the number of mingling and intermingling sounds !"

The colonel amiably did as he was bid.

"Do you hear now, the crickets, the tree-toads, the rustling of the leaves, and the faint chirping of the birds getting settled in their nests ?"

"Yes, distinctly."

"Listen again, and hear the roll of that distant carriage, a dog barking, the frogs in the marsh ; then farther off, a faint, faint sound of a girl's laughter."

"Ye-es," returned the colonel, slowly recognizing the various objects.

"Now the voices of our friends here at the end of the porch."

"Yes."

"And is that all?"

"I think so."

"Are you sure?"

The colonel paused, and listened again intently before replying, —

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Helen softly. "Why, Naomi is playing the piano close behind us, in the parlor."

"I declare, so she is; but," said the colonel, after a pause, "that seems a part of the silence."

"Because you have not been heeding her; but see, do see," she continued, not waiting for a protest, "how the moonlight is creeping around from the back of the house on both sides of us! Oh, isn't it magical, this changing of the lights! See the sunset glow is still glimmering over there in the west, and here comes the moon! They seem running a race around the earth. How well they were named Phœbus and Diana! Isn't it Phœbus and Diana?"

The colonel did not answer. The speaker's face could no longer be seen through the waning light, only the outline of her figure, her slowly swaying fan, and one gleaming edge of her flowing skirts, as it lay in the moon's white track. Was the colonel yielding to the spell of the moment? Did he recognize the soothing effect upon him of the soft voice, the easy talk that called for no assent or dissent? or did form, voice, and talk seem parts of the very scene, accommodated exquisitely to its spirit? The fiery eye of his cigar glowing through the dusk is the only answer the colonel makes to our queries.

"I really believe you have gone to sleep," exclaimed Helen suddenly.

"Not at all, I assure you."

"Then, you are laughing at me."

"Far from it."

"Then, why didn't you answer?"

"Because I — I" —

"You did not know what I was saying."

"No; I confess it: I lost myself for a moment. I am very much mortified" —

"Oh, never mind!"

"But I beg a thousand pardons: I was really enjoying your talk extremely."

"Oh, of course! fie, colonel, do you think I am a dunce?"

"On the contrary, can you not believe me? I stopped for one moment to reflect how much I was enjoying the scene, and thus lost a few sentences. I shall be much piqued if you do not go on. What were you saying?"

"Well, for this time I will be magnanimous. I was talking about the sun and moon chasing each other round the earth. I forget what I asked you; but no matter, I will ask something else, — for instance: Doesn't the sun make you think of some great noisy, rushing chariot, while the moon steals along as fleet and still as a shadow? That's why I dislike the sun, I think, because it is so noisy."

The colonel had removed his cigar for a reply, and may have smiled, as he replaced it, to find how little need there was for one.

"I wish I could stay here for a whole week!" cried Helen, after a little pause: "these summer days and nights are so perfect."

"Why don't you?" asked the colonel.

"Oh! my mother would think I had deserted her. But see, the company is going," she concluded, as the group at the other end of the porch rose to go.

"Helen, my dear, it was very good of you to look after the colonel," said Mrs. Gould, coming up after she had said good-night to her guests. "You must stay down with us this week, and help entertain him."

I am going to town to-morrow, and will call and arrange it with your mamma."

"It is such a tempting invitation, that I dare not trust myself to answer, so I will leave it for you two mammas to decide," returned the young lady, as she took the arm of her betrothed, and sauntered away in the moonlight.

"Noll," she continued later, when the others had retired, and left them alone on the piazza, "tell me about uncle Dick."

"What about him?"

"Why is he so queer, so silent, so morosely interesting?"

"Is he interesting?"

"Of course he is: he can't help it; the more he tries not to be, the more he is. He is conscientiously stiff and cold and repelling, and yet somehow this only makes him the more fascinating. I am perfectly indignant with him one minute, and the very next I weakly forgive him. Meantime he never concerns himself whether I am enraged or appeased. Whatever makes him so odd?"

"Humph, odd!"

"Now, don't put on that provoking air of stupidity: you know he is."

"I am used to him."

"Oh! that makes no difference: you know it all the same, you prevaricating, disingenuous fellow; and there's a reason for it, I am sure. He has a history."

"So have we all."

"But there's something extraordinary about uncle Dick, I know there is: I see it in your eyes. Do, Noll, tell it to me, there's a dear."

Noll shook his head.

"Why not?"

"It isn't my story: it's Uncle Dick's secret. I shouldn't presume to speak of it in his presence: I will not in his absence."

"But you can tell me something : you need not go into particulars," pleaded the young lady. "Besides, you really ought to, that I may not judge him harshly and unjustly."

"Perhaps I ought to say enough to secure him the sympathy he deserves," said Noll thoughtfully, as if struck by the last suggestion.

"Was he ever married?" asked Helen impatiently.

"No : he was engaged to a beautiful girl, who — who met with a tragic death : that is all I can tell you."

"Oh, poor, poor man!" exclaimed Helen, with a long-drawn sigh of sympathy.

"Yes, it was a terrible blow to uncle Dick : it has unsettled him for life, I fear. It drove him to the war, where he did some reckless fighting. It has destroyed his ambition : he cares for nothing. But you can see he was made for a man of action : his marked face, his vigorous frame, his nervous energy, all tell that. Yes, he is a remarkable man ; he has funds of reserved power : he could fill any position ; it is only by a waste and misdirection of all this power that he has not achieved a great success. Yet look at him : he has the air of a defeated man, with none of the confidence that belongs to his abilities. Under all his proud reserve, you can easily see he has no hope, no ambition, left. Poor uncle Dick!" concluded Noll with a sigh, "I wish there were any help for him : meanwhile he is entitled to all your forbearance. As for his moods, when the fit is on him he is intractable, and you need take neither notice nor offence."

CHAPTER VI.

"A CAST-IRON IMAGE."

HELEN HOUGHTON was used to conquest. Her career from the cradle had been one of triumph. She had a thorough understanding of her own points, which she doubtless overrated. With success she had naturally grown confident, while abundant flattery had made her exacting without in the least blunting her zest for admiration. Content with the humblest homage when better was wanting, she was not above bewitching her own maid or canary-bird.

The next morning, therefore, she entered the room with cheerful confidence. Mrs. Gould had gone to town with Noll on the early train, and left her to preside. She had parted with the colonel the night before upon terms almost cordial: they seemed to have suddenly found points of possible contact and affinity; a platform, narrow, but promising quickly to enlarge, of mutual interests and sympathies. Helen naturally took up things where she had left them. She greeted the colonel with a smile and a familiar salutation, to which she received no answer but a silent bow.

In ten hours, more or less, of unconsciousness they had drifted a measureless distance apart. But how? why? who can say? Fond friends and lovers tear themselves from each other's clinging arms by the waning moon, and the morrow's sun beholds them flung upon the misty, hither-and-thither shores of a vast, interlying sea.

If Helen was shocked, she had the address to conceal it. She may have hoped to burn away this mys-

terious, withdrawing fog of mood by the sunlight of her cheerfulness. If so, she was mistaken. The colonel ate his breakfast with a tense, inwrought, absorbed air, speaking only to the servant in attendance, and that with a brief, peremptory tone that almost made the woman tremble. Naomi, conscious of being merely a makeshift in the conversation, spoke only when spoken to, and then with scant ceremony; and yet, nothing daunted, Helen talked away busily to both her uncongenial companions, contriving to ward off the awkwardness of silence, and at length retired, cleverly dissembling whatever pique she may have felt at her failure.

At luncheon matters were even worse. Naomi excused herself from coming down: while the colonel's pre-occupation of the morning had intensified into depressing gloom. Helen studied his dark, saturnine face with a curious interest: he was a new type.

• Having, however, never had any experience of failure, she admitted now no thought of discouragement. She may even have felt a new zest in the pursuit, from the little rebuff she had received. Meanwhile she had proceeded with due caution. Taking care not to subject herself to further humiliation by vainly seeking a reply, she amiably soliloquized throughout the entire meal quite unheeded by the colonel. This was not encouraging. While at a loss, however, how to interpret his strange manner, she showed a disposition not to be tamely ignored. As they rose from the table she turned suddenly towards him, and cried, —

"Colonel, wouldn't you like to go for a ride this afternoon? Mrs. Gould commissioned me to entertain you, and I know not what else to do."

He did not answer. He looked at her blankly, with an expression from which it was impossible to gather whether he had heard or not. Her composure was not equal to this: it was being reduced to the vanishing point of insignificance. She blushed to the roots

of her hair. Presently, like one arousing from sleep, he replied with grave politeness, —

"Certainly, if you wish."

"I will order the horses, then, for four o'clock," she said, and escaped from the room to hide her embarrassment.

At four o'clock she came down stairs. The horses were at the door: the colonel was not to be seen. After a little search she found him in the library, a half-smoked cigar in his fingers, a neglected book in his lap. She stood a moment on the threshold, with the long train of her riding-habit gathered up in her hand, hesitating. At length she spoke, —

"Colonel?"

He turned his head, and looked at her absently.

"It is four o'clock: the horses are at the door."

He rose directly, and came forward, helped her to mount, looked to the fastenings of her girth, threw himself lightly into his own saddle without a word, and they cantered away down the avenue. Helen regarded her companion's face askance as they turned into the road: it had a bronze fixity of composure. Did he know where he was going, or with whom, or what she was saying? It was doubtful. Nevertheless she prattled on, —

"What a delicious breeze! I hope there will not be much dust. — Oh, I love to ride! and there are such beautiful roads about here! — Of course you know them all, though: they can't have changed much since you went away. — But then you must have seen a great many more beautiful places. — This is well enough for New England, but it isn't Switzerland. After all, I don't know that I should care to have it any wilder: it may be more picturesque, but it's not half so convenient. — It is all very well to get a fine view from the top of a hill, but you always have to climb the hill first. — Oh, do look at that lovely little squirrel running across the road! — I often wonder how squirrels live

down in holes in the ground. I should think they would stifle. — What do you suppose they do for air?"

Thus directly addressed, the colonel bent a look upon his companion as if trying to account for her presence, and after a moment answered somewhat incoherently, —

"Ah! I beg pardon. You were saying" —

"Why, that — I declare, it has gone entirely out of my head," returned Helen, too much taken up with her companion's manner to take note of her own words. "It was something about — but it really doesn't matter. Did you ever think, Col. Gould, — now this is going to be a moral reflection, and very, very profound, — that riding along a country road is very like going through life? You have the ups and the downs, the rough places and the smooth, the sunshine and the shadow; high clear spots, where you can see a long distance ahead and the way looks bright and fair, and then dark close places where it's all twists and turns, dark and crooked and disappointing. I should think somebody would put that into a poem; perhaps they have: I should have forgotten it if they had. I always forget poetry. Some of the girls used to say off strings and strings of it. I always wondered when they learned it. But I think folks that quote things are very tiresome, don't you? For, if you know it, you're vexed that you didn't remember it yourself; and, if you don't know it, you pay no attention, and think what bores they are. On the whole, I shouldn't care to be a bright person — I mean, a really clever person. I should ever so much rather be a great singer. I think that must be perfectly delightful. Nobody ever expects you to know any thing, and people go into fits of rapture over you. I should rather be a prima donna than any thing else in the world. It would be sort of dreadful to go upon the stage; but you'd get over that very soon, and you'd delight everybody, and make lots of money, and go everywhere,

and see every thing. Don't you think it would be an ideal existence?"

The colonel looked at her blankly as before.

"I asked," she continued hesitatingly, "if you don't think it would be the finest thing in life to be a great prima donna?"

"No," said the colonel shortly.

"Why not?" asked Helen with commendable boldness.

"Because I do not believe in a woman's making a show of herself."

"But don't you think there is something else,—something higher? Oh, dear, I don't know how to say it!—something that ought to make us forget that consideration?"

"No."

"I guess you don't like music."

"There is one thing, and one thing only, that makes a woman finer than a man; that is delicacy: if she loses that, she loses all distinction of sex—worth counting," he added in an undertone.

Helen looked discomfited and reproved. She lapsed into a silence which she found it every minute more difficult to break, and thus she rode on for several miles without a word.

A happy accident came to her relief. The loud whirring of a partridge in a roadside thicket startled her horse. He shied across the way, and started on a run. In alarm she dropped the reins, and cried for help. Her companion awoke to instant action. He put his horse to a gallop. Directly he came up alongside, seized the frightened animal by the head, drew him up with a powerful grasp, and brought him presently to a standstill. It was all over in a minute. It was a trifling incident, not worth telling save for its issue.

"Don't be afraid! I have him! Are you hurt?"

The hurried words, the eager looks of sympathy,

the face lighted up with feeling, transformed the man. It was no wonder, that, pale and trembling as she was with terror, Helen regarded the sudden change with astonishment.

Now he could scarcely do enough : he walked his horse by her side, supported her in the saddle, studied her countenance with anxious solicitude, and thus proceeded all the way home, talking gently and reassuringly as he went.

Helen was at length quite at her ease. No one knew better how to receive attentions with an air of prizing them, but not unduly ; that is, with an air of graciousness a little dashed with indifference. She was accustomed to homage, and never allowed herself to appear oppressed, much less overwhelmed, by it. She accepted in this instance all the care and attention the colonel bestowed upon her, with an amiable gratitude, but quite as a matter of course. The rôle of the protector suited the colonel admirably : perhaps this occurred to Helen, while she consciously shone in that of the *protégée*.

But the incident, slight as it was, served to place their acquaintance for a time upon a different footing. The colonel showed an attentive consideration, a little solicitude, in his treatment of her ; while Helen dexterously used the accident as capital, and eked out the interest she was entitled to on account of it, for several days, during which the colonel would straightway unbend his brow at her approach, and lend himself to any plan for her entertainment. Helen, perhaps, over-estimated the value of the impression she had created : at any rate, she had already begun to assume a somewhat confident air in her relations with the colonel, which a little incident presently occurred to show her was quite unwarranted. Looking from her window late one night, after the household had retired, she saw a dark form moving in and out among the trees, which, after a little, she made out to be the

colonel. Acting on the impulse of the moment, she threw a light wrap over her shoulders, stole out of the house, and suddenly presented herself before him.

The colonel stopped, and looked at her in silence. He was about to proceed when she approached, and, throwing aside her mantle, asked laughingly, —

"Did you think I was a ghost, colonel?"

"No."

"Are you going to take a walk?" she asked, as he turned to move away.

"Yes," he answered in the tone with which one replies to an interruption.

"I guess I will go too — if I may?"

The colonel was silent. Standing there so motionless in the half-light, he looked like a man of stone.

"Are you going far?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't mind the distance a bit. Do you object to my going?"

"You can do as you choose," came impatiently after a long pause, with the manner of one driving away a troublesome insect.

Helen, as we have seen, was not easily discouraged. She had been successful with the colonel before in these moods. It may have been pique now, that determined her: it may have been a feeling that he ought not to be left to himself. Whatever her motive, she evidently determined to avail herself of the hardly-extorted privilege. Accordingly, falling into his step, she proceeded down the avenue and out upon the highway. He struck a great pace: she soon began to pant, then to lag behind, and run a few steps to keep up. She found breath, however, to talk brokenly. Her companion did not reply. To all appearance he was utterly unconscious of her presence. The moon, which had been shining brightly, presently became obscured. They were traversing a lonely road: they arrived at length at the foot of a high hill, the top of

which was crowned with dense woods. Helen stopped, and regarded the prospect with reasonable consternation.

"Colonel!" she cried.

The colonel stalked on without a word.

"I cannot go so fast, colonel: I must stop to breathe."

He still walked on, deaf to her cry.

"Do stop a minute! I really must — colonel — Do you hear?"

He was getting far ahead: only his shadowy form could now be seen in the darkness.

"Colonel — Colonel Gould — do not leave me here! Stop! I shall die of fright!"

His footsteps died away in the distance, and only the discordant cry of a screech-owl broke the silence of the night.

Helen stood for a moment motionless. It is doubtful whether fear or anger most swayed her; but she sat down upon a wayside stone, and burst into tears. Having after a little recovered her breath, and given vent to her emotion, she arose, and made the best of her way home.

The next morning she did not choose to appear at breakfast, and contrived not to meet the colonel all day. Mrs. Gould was too busy or pre-occupied to be inquisitive, and thus Helen was left to herself. Noll came down in the evening, and took her for a drive. When she came out dressed to go, he was already in the wagon waiting for her, and talking to uncle Dick, who sat at the end of the porch smoking. How Helen contrived not to see the latter, and why she directly began to bristle all over with a thousand unwonted caprices, will perhaps be understood by those who are acquainted with the world of mysterious, impalpable motives that actuate half the sayings and doings of conscious young-womanhood. Unsuspecting Noll danced attendance for ten minutes upon his

exactng mistress, putting up and down the back of the wagon, tucking in the robe now on this side, now on that, opening her umbrella, buttoning her gloves, etc.

At length they started. Helen was so silent for the first quarter of an hour, that Noll at length remarked upon it. She immediately became loquacious.

They took a long drive ; coming home through the neighboring village, they met a young woman upon the roadside—at least, she appeared young at a distance ; but, nearer at hand, she had a haggard and jaded look, through which there could be still recognized a faded remnant of prettiness. She was cheaply but decently dressed, and led by one hand a small child, while with the other she pushed before her a fat baby in a perambulator.

"How should you like to be that woman?" asked Noll suddenly.

"How ridiculous you are !"

"Answer !"

"I shouldn't like it at all, of course."

"Why not?"

"Because all her good looks are gone ; she seems dragged to death, poor thing, and she is wretchedly poverty-stricken."

"What is there so bad about poverty?"

"Ugh !" exclaimed Helen with a shudder.

"Should you dread to be poor?"

"What an absurd question ! I should rather die."

Noll asked no more absurd questions, and busied himself brushing the flies from his horse with his long whip.

"Noll, what were you going to tell me?"

"When?"

"The other day : you said you were going to make a clean breast of something ; don't you remember?"

Noll's face suddenly clouded, and he bit his lip.

"What right has my Noll to keep secrets from me?"

she continued, stealing her hand through his arm, and leaning her head coaxingly upon his shoulder. "When is he going to tell me? hm-m, when?"

It was evidently with a strong effort that he controlled his voice to reply.

"By and by. Very soon: the time has not come yet."

"That is what you always do, — always put me off," she returned pettishly.

"Tell me what you have been doing down here these two or three days?" he said with a sudden change of tone, "and how you get on with uncle Dick."

Helen dropped his arm, and straightened herself like a flash.

"Don't speak of him."

"What's the matter?"

"He's a cast-iron image, and I hate him."

Despite this emphatic speech, when Mrs. Gould renewed her invitation to Miss Houghton at the end of the week, it was accepted.

CHAPTER VII.

"WIPIN' AN' THINKIN'."

THE great wall threw a slowly-lengthening blanket of shadow down Pike's Court. The Italian was drowsing over his pile of bananas; the old apple-woman sat gloomily regarding three glasses of weak lemonade, in which the ice had long since melted; the cobbler paused now and then in his hammering to wipe his forehead on his sleeve; several slouchy-looking women sat in the doorways with bared necks and arms. It was toward the close of a hot midsummer afternoon, that Miss Badger passed up the court on her way to the "dépôt." The women sitting in the doorways looked after her, and wagged their heads.

"There goes the millionaire!" said the wife of the mason and plasterer, and one of the oldest dwellers in the court.

"She won't set the North River ablaze with her beauty," added the rat-eyed wife of a journeyman-tailor, whose husband had gone to carry home some work, and thus given her a moment's leisure.

"No; but she might, though, with her head," replied the plasterer's wife, with a chuckle at her own humor.

"She the one that gained the great lawsuit?" asked a thin, timid little woman who was pushed back on an inner step.

"Yes; but my husband hears what's going on, an' he says she isn't worth half what folks say," said the wife of the restaurant-keeper.

"Oh! your husband's like the miser's parrot: he

knows too much," interrupted the plasterer's wife, jealous of her credit as a gossip. "I had it from Mrs. Flannigan, that lives next floor to the lawyer's clerk, and she says it's a flat million."

"The Lord save us!" exclaimed a tired-looking washerwoman, who had just returned from a day's work, wiping the perspiration from her face with her parboiled hand, as she gazed admiringly after Miss Badger. "She might pave the whole coort wid goold, an' we breakin' our hearts wid the toil."

"A meel-ion dollars," murmured the mother of the Jew tobacconist, — a wrinkled old hag who had lately retired from the old clo' business. "A meel-ion dollars," she repeated with a sceptical chuckle: "dat ish great deal of monish, my deers, for von young womans."

Meantime Miss Badger, placidly oblivious of the comments that followed her, went steadily on her way to the "dépôt." She let herself in softly with a latch-key, passed noiselessly through the store-room, tip-toed down the passage, and, suddenly opening the door of the workshop, entered in a matter-of-course way, thereby nearly startling off their seats two pale, sickly-looking youths who were busily engaged bottling and labelling.

"How do you get on?" asked Miss Badger in a half-prostrated voice.

"Pretty well'm."

"Got enough to last the rest of the day?"

"Yes'm, I guess so."

Miss Badger inspected the contents of the tub, which she had herself mixed, and swept a sidelong glance over the work-table, saying simply, as she turned to go out, —

"Wäll."

This exclamation had various possible meanings, and the two clerks were evidently at a loss whether to feel re-assured or alarmed.

On going up-stairs Miss Badger found her mother busy getting tea.

"Well, V'lumny, what luck?"

"Not a great deal."

It will be impossible to conceive Miss Badger personally, unless her habit of drawling the last word of a sentence, and re-arranging her lips, be remembered.

"D'you see him?"

"Yes."

"What d'he say?"

"He didn't say any thing pertickler."

"D'you git the bill?"

"Wall — no."

"D'he say how much 'twould be?"

"No, he didn't exactly."

"V'lumny Badger, that man is a villain! Mark my words: you can put in your eye all you'll ever git out of that case. I knew you'd have trouble with him. I told you so from the very" —

"Mother!" said Miss Badger, suddenly interrupting.

"What?"

"Hev' you been keepin' an eye on the boys?"

"To be sure."

"Either of 'em been out while I was away?"

"No: why?"

"They don't seem to have got on extry well with their bottlin'."

"They've done enough, I guess: it's a hot day, an' I don't b'lieve in drivin' help to death."

"I'm sure I don't want to drive anybody; but, if they can't keep up with the work, we shall hev' to cheng."

"No need of frettin' 'bout that yet."

"The business has got to be 'tended to, I s'pose."

"There ain't any great danger of our neglectin' it, I guess; but, V'lumny," exclaimed Mrs. Badger, pausing as she was cutting the bread, and gesticulating

impressively with the breadknife, "I want to tell you one thing!"

"Wäll?" said Miss Badger, her eyes darkening with curiosity.

"I think them boys hev' got to drinkin' it."

"I haven't missed any," returned Miss Badger with a self-satisfied air.

"That makes no odds."

"I mix just enough for four gross, an' the bottles come out even."

"Supposin' they do? Can't they take out what they want, an' fill up with water, I sh'd like to know?"

Miss Badger was silent, perhaps with mortification that so obvious a reflection had not occurred to her.

"What makes you think so?" she asked after a while.

"'Cause they begin to look unhealthy."

"I don't see any difference in 'em."

"'Cause you don't notice. I tell you they begin to look just like your father an' uncle" —

"If you keep sayin' that over long enough, by an' by folks'll begin to believe it," interrupted Miss Badger, with a faint approach to a sneer. "Father'n' uncle Pete warn't ever very tough, an' they couldn't hev' lived long anyway."

"Pooh! they killed themselves drinkin' that stuff! I told 'em they would, all the time; an' so would you 'f I hadn't stopped your drinkin' it."

"It's almost a wonder it don't kill other folks."

"So 'twould 'f they kep' swiggin' it down all the time."

"Folks seem to like it. We git red of two or three hundred bottles a day."

"'Cause they want to be dosin' with something, an' they take the thing that's cracked up the loudest, an' tastes the best. I never knew a man yet that didn't like rum an' molasses."

"Rather strange that most of 'em find it does 'em so much good."

"Fudge! they'd find dish-water do 'em good 'f they thought 'twas goin' to. It's all their imaginations. If folks would let themselves alone a little, an' stop dosin', there'd be fewer doctors an' 'pothecary-shops."

"So, if they'd stop wearin' shoes, there'd be fewer shoe-shops, I s'pose," said Miss Badger in a tone utterly unemphatic.

"They don't give nature a chance," continued Mrs. Badger, without regarding her daughter. "Let them stop stuffin' an' crammin' an' guzzlin' an' druggin'; let their stomachs get empty now an' then. I tell you there's nothin' like a little salubrious starvation for these invalids. Most of the stomachs in the community are overworked: they git tired out, of course, and they don't git any chance to rest. Folks seem to think their stomach is a kind of sink they can pour any thing into, an' mix every thing up in, an' never need clear it out."

The only visible sign of emotion Miss Badger ever exhibited was the darkening of her eyes: these now showed almost black, by which it was evident she did not approve of her mother's discourse.

"If you know so much about it," she replied, without a vestige of warmth or emphasis, "why don't you make a speech on the subject at the next suffrage-convention? The doctors might like to git your ideas: they seem to be original."

"I think I shall," retorted Mrs. Badger defiantly, fixing her daughter with a levelling glance from her spectacles.

"'Twould be such a help to the business," said Miss Badger with a parting shaft, as she went over and began to busy herself with the cactus.

"I ain't in the habit of doin' any thing to hurt the business, an' I ain't likely to," returned Mrs. Badger, on whom a shaft of her daughter rarely failed to take

effect. "I think the 'Onnyton' is as good as any medicine. I don't think it hurts anybody we sell to, 'cause they don't take enough of it; but if I did, I'll let you know, V'lumny Badger, that I'd smash every bottle, and pour it into the street, business or no business, 'fore I'd have a hand in poisonin' folks by whole-sale; an' you know whether I mean what I say."

Miss Badger evidently thought she had gone as far as it was prudent; for she wisely refrained from further discussion, and busied herself with her plant. She remained for a long time silent, apparently absorbed in her task. Her mother, with much banging and slamming, proceeded with her housework.

"V'lumny," she cried at length, coming in from the kitchen with the teapot.

"Wäll,"

"When is that auction comin' off?"

"To-morrow, I b'lieve."

"You know where it is?"

"I've heard it mentioned."

"Are you goin'?"

"I think's likely."

"Then I shall go too. I want to know what's goin' on."

"Wäll, go, 'f you want to."

"What you goin' to do about that bill?"

Miss Badger made no answer, but kept on attending to her plant. Presently her mother summoned her to tea. Still she did not stir. Three times Mrs. Badger repeated her summons, when suddenly her daughter turned about, and said, with no sign of irritation or annoyance, —

"Mother."

"Eh!"

"I wish you would hold your tongue: I'm thinkin'."

Mrs. Badger looked as shocked as though she had been suddenly struck. Never in the course of her

life had her daughter spoken to her in such a way before. She sat looking at her now in mute amazement: nothing but her silhouette could be seen in the waning light, as she stood mechanically wiping the dust from the thick misshapen leaves.

The tea grows cold upon the table; the shadows gather thickly in the court without; the lamps glisten all up and down the city streets; the great wheels and the little wheels have grown dim and far off; and still Miss Badger stands at her post, wiping — wiping — wiping the big, ugly leaves, — wiping and "thinkin'."

CHAPTER VIII.

COBWEBS.

HELEN was up early the next morning to see Noll off; and when, an hour afterwards, the colonel came out upon the porch with his cigar, she was busy making bouquets. They had not spoken together since the moonlight walk. The colonel approached of his own accord. He was in one of his gracious moods, and addressed her in a tone of formal gallantry, about which, despite its stiffness, there was something quaint and sweet.

"Good-morning, Miss Helen. I had at first a little doubt whether one of the flowers had not taken on human semblance like Pygmalion's image."

Perhaps Helen had really forgotten her resentment of the previous evening. Perhaps she had been acute enough to discover that she was not of the stately order of women, on whom disdain sits well, and that a little woman in the sulks is one of the most ridiculous objects in life. However that may be, she met the colonel's advance in the most perfect temper.

"What a lovely compliment!" she cried. "Now, if I knew any thing about Pygmalion or his image, I might say something fine: compare you, for instance, to Pygmalion. Who was he — a nice sort of person?"

"So, so; a conceited young fellow, who fell in love with his own handiwork."

"Dear, dear! Then I'll take it back. But I don't know: why is that so very dreadful? we all of us do it, don't we? Else how should we ever get any thing done? Now," she continued, holding up a bunch of flowers all sparkling with dew, "I'm some-

thing like Pygmalion ; I am ever so satisfied with this bouquet I'm making : do you see ? I put these dark laurel-leaves here, in the middle distance, so to speak ; then these lighter leaves outside for perspective ; while I mass these magnificent scarlet geraniums here in the foreground, and behold the bouquet ! Could any thing be finer for its purpose ? This is made to be big and striking ; to be flung like a firebrand at the end of the parlor, amongst all those cool grays. Now, here is something different : a bunch of rosebuds. I shall put nothing but a few of their own leaves with them, for nothing earthly can improve upon a bunch of rosebuds ; so I simply shake them loosely apart, — thus, — and put them in this brown jug. If you are not listening now, it's your own loss : you might be learning lots about bouquet-making, so that you could set up a street flower-stand ; I often think I should like to set up a street flower-stand. Now, for this tall crystal vase, I want something graceful : let me see," she continued, turning over the mass of flowers in her lap, "I will take these poppies, — why can't everybody see at a glance, that the poppy is the most elegant flower that grows ? — and a spray or two of these fuchsias. Do you see why I do that ? Why, because of the colors partly, and partly because of their delicious droop over the edge of the vase ; this is all for grace, you understand : and now for a bit of maidenhair-fern, and it is done."

The colonel brought a chair, and sat down in an attentive attitude, as though nothing better than this could be thought of as a sauce to his morning's cigar.

"So far, all has been for show," continued Helen, snipping off the faded flowers and leaves with her tiny scissors ; "designed only to catch the eye, and dazzle the imagination. Here is to be something very different : these are to be knots of fragrance ; sweet neutralities to be tucked about here and there on stands and tables, to rest the eyes upon, after the blaze of those fiercer things. See : I take these big velvet

pansies, and luscious heliotrope, and these fresh sprigs of mignonnette. Aren't they sweet? I will put them in these cream-colored pots: don't you see, I'm just like Pygmalion,—I'm in love with my own work?"

"You have good cause: you cannot help yourself," returned the colonel, still in his elaborate way.

"What audacious flattery! Do you think I catch at any thing in the shape of a compliment? Of course, or you wouldn't be so very downright with them: you'd beat about the bush a little. But you are right. To be perfectly frank, I will confess that I can never resist a compliment. I know lots of girls who pretend they don't like them," she continued, turning the bouquets one by one around, and re-arranging here and there a leaf or bud. "But, pooh! They do; everybody likes a nice compliment: and did you ever notice, that old ladies and gentlemen are just as greedy for them as the young folks?"

The colonel murmured something inarticulate in reply. It was evident from his look, that he would not have dared to be more definite. Yet he was gazing at the speaker with an absorbed interest quite new to him. Had a late revelation of her prettiness just dawned upon him? Or was it the charm of her present unconsciousness?

Whatever it was, it is noteworthy, that when she at length arose, gathered up her vases, and floated away through the window, the colonel suppressed a little sigh, lit another cigar, and opened his neglected paper with a listless air.

Perhaps life and the world were set bristling with sharp contrasts to teach us the true worth of certain blessings we might else undervalue. So, if the colonel was indulging in any bachelor reflections that it was woman in the abstract, and female society in general, that he was just awaking to an appreciation of, he was destined speedily to have his error corrected.

The very day of his conversation with Helen over the flowers, he announced his intention of going to the city on the morrow; whereupon Mrs. Gould asked him to take charge of Naomi, who was going to town to attend some exercises at the blind-asylum. The colonel assented with a noticeable reluctance. He and Naomi never seemed to get on well together; whether from a failure to discern, or a want of tact in dealing with, each other's peculiarities.

The next morning Naomi, who was naturally agitated at the prospect of the trip, appeared with her bonnet and gloves on, long before the hour, and had been sitting in the carriage in feverish impatience many minutes before the colonel came forth, and leisurely took his seat.

"We shall be late," she cried nervously.

"I think not," said the colonel dryly.

"I'm sure we shall. We have only a quarter of an hour by my watch, and that is slow."

"We have plenty of time."

Silenced by this positive assertion, Naomi settled back in her seat, and contented herself with feeling her watch every few minutes during the ride. When they reached the *dépôt*, the colonel handed her out, and looked for her umbrella, as the sun was very hot.

"I lost it out of the carriage," she explained.

"Why didn't you ask me to stop?"

"Because I thought we should be too late."

Thus the day began, and so it continued. Each, acting from a separate and apparently logical standpoint, succeeded in defeating and exasperating the other. Naomi was left at the asylum. The colonel was to call for her at a certain hour. Detained by business, he was twenty minutes late. When he arrived, she was gone. Alarmed, he searched the city, went to all their friends and acquaintances, and only found her at nightfall at the *dépôt*. Too vexed, apparently, to trust himself to remonstrate, the colonel

asked no explanation, uttered no reproach. Silence affected Naomi more than upbraiding. She did not speak for some time after they had taken their seats in the cars. At length, turning to him suddenly, she cried, —

"You're angry because I went away from the asylum."

"Yes."

"You ought to have come after me when you said you would."

"I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"I was unavoidably detained."

"You ought not to have undertaken it, then."

"We cannot control events."

"Then we must take the consequences."

"We can at least hold our tongues."

Thus rebuffed, Naomi kept silent for the rest of the way. Arrived at home, she alighted from the carriage, and, whirling about abruptly to the colonel, upon the broad stone step, exclaimed, "I'm sorry!" and ran hastily into the house.

Helen sat upon the porch, and smiled them a welcome. Dressed in creamy white, with a dash of yellow at her neck, she looked like some fair, full-blown water-lily, breathing around an atmosphere of coolness and tranquillity. She must have heard Naomi's apology; she must have noted the two faces; and, if so, needed no commentary upon the situation. If she had known every event of the day; if the colonel had made a confession of his state of mind, she could not have more cleverly adapted her mood of cool languor to his hot, nervous irritability. She did not disturb herself at their approach, so well she knew that her supreme charm for the moment was one of repose. And thus she sat, serene and still and smiling, and rang her silver bell upon the twilight air.

The colonel, wiping his heated face, settled himself

in a neighboring chair, and yielded himself willingly to the spell.

"What a lovely sunset ! Marine views, landscapes, and grotesques, all jumbled up. There's a whole archipelago of pink islands over there in a yellow sea. I suppose you think it's nonsense, picking out things in the clouds ; but I always do it. Somehow it seems to make the world twice as big, like the mirrors in the shops. Now, yonder there is an old castle, with turrets, and pinnacles, and battlements, and all the rest of those architectural things, a great deal finer than ever was on the Rhine. Did you ever think what a blessing the twilight is ? Just think if we didn't have it ! Suppose the sun, when it got out there beyond the horizon, dropped down like a plummet. How horrible it would be — pitch darkness springing down upon us like that ! Oh, dear ! how many things there are to be grateful for ! I sometimes have grateful fits when I try to be grateful for every thing, when I positively ache with gratitude ; and yet I know perfectly well that I haven't done justice to the subject ; that I can't, and that nobody can. What do you suppose I have been doing to-day ? watching the cook and Mrs. Gould make preserves. Mrs. Gould says she always superintends it herself. I think I could do it now ; I'm sure I could ; I learn to do every thing with my hands very quickly. What funny things get running in your head ! Milton's hymn has been haunting me all day. I learned it when I was a little girl. They say it is very fine in a literary way. I cannot judge of that : I prize it only for its melody. Do you remember any thing to equal it ? Last week I was saying, —

"'The dews of summer night did fall,'

from 'Cumnor Hall,' you know, that Walter Scott used to rave about. It's very tiresome running around all day in the city, isn't it ?"

The colonel, gazing at the speaker in deep abstraction, came slowly to the surface, heaving a sigh of delicious repose as he murmured assent.

Presently Helen began to pick up her things to go, — a book, a spool, a pair of scissors. The colonel looked on silently. She approached the door.

"Must you go?"

Only three words; but spoken with an involuntary air, and as though, in spite of the speaker's will, they brought — no, not a blush, but something more evanescent, — a light of pleased consciousness, for a moment, to Helen's face, as she paused, partly turned, and answered easily, —

"Must! oh, no! there's no compulsion. Doesn't everybody do as he likes here, that is to say, just as Mrs. Gould likes?" she added a little slyly. "I will stay longer if you" —

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed the colonel, recollecting himself, "not on my account. Excuse me: I didn't think what I was saying. Don't let me detain you."

"Perhaps it isn't worth while. It will be tea-time in ten minutes. Meantime, mustn't your hair be brushed?"

And away she went with a smile upon her lips, through the dark parlors, the wide old hall, and up the old-fashioned stairway, to her own room. With the same smile she sat down before her mirror, and remained in rapt, absorbed study of her own face, till the tea-bell rang in the hall below.

A hundred words, a million, hundreds and hundreds of millions of explanation and protestation, pour forth their unavailing flood in the vain attempt to blot out the pleasure or pain, the doubt or conviction, produced by three poor monosyllables. Thus a word may be but an air-bubble, or it may be an eternal fact. Oh the priceless worth of silence! Oh the terror of speech!

But what are these cobwebs we are busied with?

All these filmy threads — whither do they lead? What is their significance? Let us have patience; it may be worth while; at any rate, we have no choice for the moment but to follow them.

For two or three days after his trip to the city, the colonel absented himself almost entirely from the family, until Mrs. Gould at length remarked upon the circumstance. Helen, too, puzzled over it a good deal; and perhaps she began to think her complacent little smile above-described was premature. If such were her impression, it must have been confirmed by a little incident that occurred early one morning, as she was strolling down the avenue towards the road, to while away a few minutes before breakfast. She stopped near the gate to watch the gardener at work, trimming the hedge. Wearying of this, at length she turned to pass through the gate, and almost ran against the colonel, who was hastily entering.

"Do not touch me! Do not come near me!" he cried, in a loud, peremptory voice.

"Col-onel Gould!" exclaimed Helen, in a tone of amazed expostulation.

"Go away! go away instantly! Do you hear me?" he continued, more sternly than before.

"Are you aware that we are in the presence of a" —

"Do not come near me, I tell you! Go away!" continued the colonel, almost savagely.

Shocked and alarmed, Helen obeyed. She turned, and walked towards the house. Looking around, as she entered the door, she saw the colonel slowly walking after her up the avenue.

Whatever she thought of his strange behavior, she kept her own counsel, and took her place, as usual, at the breakfast-table. The colonel did not appear. About an hour afterwards, going to the library in search of Mrs. Gould, Helen found the two in con-

sultation. She turned to withdraw. Mrs. Gould called her back. As she advanced, the colonel rose and went to the window at the end of the room. With a woman's quick eye she noticed that he had changed his clothes. She did her errand, and retired. The colonel did not look around or notice her, and she did not venture to speak to him. In the course of the day Mrs. Gould told her that a poor man in a neighboring cottage had died in the night, of the small-pox, and that the colonel had been with him because no nurse could be found, and that they were keeping it quiet on account of the terror it would cause amongst the townspeople. This, then, explained his manner at the gate: it was the presence of the gardener. Perhaps Helen wondered why he had not accounted for his brusqueness afterwards; perhaps she thought he would do so yet. She was mistaken. Did he, then, disdain to let her know that he was doing her a service? Was he indifferent what she thought? Helen must have been a little puzzled whether to yield to pique or admiration. Does any one think the question a small one? Many a woman has been shipwrecked in the whirlpool interlying these petty dilemmas.

Thursday of the second week of Helen's stay had come. Noll had been sent for, and was coming down in the evening to stay over Sunday. A little excursion had been arranged for the morrow, Friday. Mrs. Gould took an active part in the arrangements. Whatever her anxieties or plans, she kept them to herself, or confided such as she chose secretly to the colonel. Helen saw nothing in the look or manner of her hostess to betoken a crisis in her affairs. Noll duly arrived, looking somewhat worn and anxious. His mother's calm cheerfulness may have re-assured him; for he presently plucked up a show of spirits, and played a game of croquet with Helen. The latter

was very gay: she rallied him incessantly upon his blues, knocked his ball about mercilessly, and made the colonel umpire in their disputes.

The next day proved fair. The party started betimes. They drove for some miles into the country, left their horses, and turned into the woods to visit a small waterfall. They had explored the place, eaten their luncheon, and were on the way home in excellent cheer, when the sky suddenly darkened, huge clouds came sweeping down upon them, the wind whistled and shrieked through the forest, and a storm was at hand. There was no shelter near, and they took temporary refuge under a large oak. The lightning flashed momentarily more fiercely, and the thunder growled threateningly. The rain at length came, and came in torrents. The woods grew dark. An awe-struck hush fell upon the party. Naomi alone showed a curious enthusiasm in this tumult of the elements, which she could not behold; while Helen, almost overcome with fright, stood cowering between the colonel and Noll, clinging to the latter's arm.

The storm soon rose to fury. Bolt followed bolt in deafening succession. At length came a flash that filled the air with a lurid, intolerable glare, a crash that seemed to rend heaven and earth, and a tall tree, close before them, was splintered to its roots. A cry of terror rang in their ears. A moment of inky darkness ensued; then confused senses began to perceive — what was it? Helen! She had swooned, and now lay senseless *in the arms of Col. Gould*. Was it mere accident? or, at a moment when instinct usurps the place of caution, prudence, and all ordinary guides, had nature betrayed her?

The first feeling was one of simple alarm. She might be dead or dying. All gathered around. Mrs. Gould took off her hat, and applied simple restoratives. Noll, kneeling by her side, chafed her cold hands, and watched her pallid face; while the colo-

nel looked down upon the fair form he was supporting with anxious concern.

With signs of reviving consciousness all was changed. Anxiety died, and suspicion was born. To one, at least, of the circle, the situation evidently seemed peculiar. When Col. Gould raised his eyes he found his sister-in-law looking at him with a strange and unusual expression, — a look cold, clear, and searching. He returned the gaze with one of calm surprise, which was so unmistakably genuine, it could not fail of effect. The suspicion had already begun to fade from Mrs. Gould's face, when suddenly, as though he had just divined her meaning, the colonel visibly reddened through his bronze complexion.

Mrs. Gould glanced quickly at her son, and perceived with evident relief the peaceful unconsciousness of his look.

By the time they reached home, Helen had completely recovered, and was in excellent spirits for the rest of the day and evening.

Before going to bed that night, Mrs. Gould made two little calls. The first was upon her visitor.

"How do you feel now, my dear?"

"Oh! perfectly well, thank you," answered Helen cheerfully, as she went on putting up her thick braids for the night.

"Do you discover no ill effects from your shock?"

"None at all."

"Do you feel well enough to ride to-morrow?"

"Ride?"

"Yes: to travel."

Helen looked quickly at her hostess.

"Because," continued the latter, "I have been thinking that if you feel quite well, perhaps you had better go to town to-morrow, and finish your visit to me at some other time."

Helen studied the speaker's face calmly and curi-

ously. Unlike the colonel, she met Mrs. Gould's penetrating look with perfect *aplomb*, and went composedly on with her task.

"You will understand, my dear, that this suggestion is made from no want of hospitality."

"Oh, certainly !"

"But it will be better for us both that you should come at another time."

"You remember," returned Helen, calmly defensive, "that I have prolonged my visit at your own solicitation : strictly speaking, I ought not to have come in the first instance."

"It was very obliging of you," said Mrs. Gould.

Helen colored slightly at this, but easily disguised it by her uplifted arms.

"Then I had better go to-morrow morning."

"Any time you like. I hope you will find yourself quite well in the morning. Good-night."

"Thank you : good-night."

Shutting the door gently, Mrs. Gould was gone without her usual caress. Did Helen notice the omission? We may be reasonably sure that she noticed every thing peculiar in the interview.

Going to her son's room, Mrs. Gould found him already in bed.

"Noll," she said sitting down beside him, "have you told Helen yet?"

"No, old lady ; not yet."

"And why not?"

"Because I cannot tell her such a thing under my own roof ; because I will not take even the most trivial advantage of her."

"There need be no further delay on that score, for she goes back to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow ! You mean Monday."

"I mean what I say ; and I advise you to lose no time in telling her, — good night."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRINCE AND THE BEGGAR.

THE summer breeze was blowing freshly through the wide old hall from one open door to the other, rustling the papers on the table, and swaying the tilted pictures on the wall, when Oliver came down-stairs next morning. The household was not yet astir. He threw himself into a large oaken chair near the staircase, and idly caressed the head of a favorite setter-dog ; studying, the while, the pattern of the carpet, grotesquely inweaving its many curves and angles with his passing thought.

Presently there was a light patter of feet, and a rustle of garments upon the stairs ; and Helen came tripping down, and landed with a little bound at his feet.

"What is the meaning of this sudden move?" he asked.

"You have heard that I am going, then?"

"Yes."

"Your mother told you?"

"Yes ; but she said she would leave it to you to explain."

"Did she? Oh, yes ! to be sure."

"Why is it?"

"It is — it is — hm-m — suppose we say, caprice !"

Noll looked at her with a patient air, as though expecting a more satisfactory answer.

"Is not that reason enough for any move of mine?"

"I have come home expressly to have a holiday with you."

"I know it seems sinfully ungrateful: but there are reasons; there really are. My mother wants me, — in short, it is a secret."

"But why not Monday?"

She shook her head.

"What difference can one day make?"

"All the difference in the world. No: I must go to-day. There now, don't ask me another question!"

"But" —

She put her hand playfully over his mouth.

"Sh-h! not another word; will you take me to the dépôt? Eh? Nod your head! Very well: I want to start at nine o'clock."

Noll thus silenced, the way was clear. The colonel asked no questions, showed no surprise, and expressed only a decent regret. Mrs. Gould meanwhile was scrupulous in attention, and followed her guest to the carriage-door with pains-taking hospitality. Helen smiled and bowed so many times, and waved her handkerchief so briskly, that the parting seemed very animated; and it is doubtful if Noll noticed that the two ladies had omitted their usual embrace. He did, however, notice that Helen was unusually gay on the way to the dépôt, and accused her of being glad to go.

"Well, so I am: am I not going to mamma?"

"But you are leaving me."

"To be sure: I did not think of that. Are you sorry?"

He did not answer.

"Very, very sorry?" she continued, looking up searchingly in his face.

He was still silent. He evidently did not think a reply necessary.

"But you will come to see me soon?" she pursued, still studying his face.

He nodded.

"Very soon?"

"Yes."

When he did go, one evening early in the week, Helen uttered a little cry at his aspect: she had never seen him looking so pale, so worn, so utterly despondent.

"Noll," she cried, standing before him, and taking his face in both her hands, with a pretty caressing air, "what an unmitigated owl you are! You look as though you had buried all your friends!"

He gazed at her with an indescribable expression.

"Why don't you speak?"

"Isn't it much the same to have buried all your hopes?" he said huskily.

"Pooh! no: get some more! neither are worth dying for."

"Brave talk, little one!"

"Noll," she cried, as if with a sudden idea, "have you ever done any thing wicked?"

"Yes."

"Ah, I was afraid so! Tell me about it. What was it?"

"A good many things."

"Oh, no, no!" she cried impatiently: "I mean something very wicked."

"I don't know."

"Don't be mysterious: you do know! Have you ever done any thing awful?"

"No."

"How can you look so, then?"

"Helen," he said, after a long fit of musing, "do you remember the fairy-story I read you a long time ago, of the maiden who married a prince, and went to live in a beautiful palace, and waked up one morning to find the prince turned into a ragged beggar, and the fine palace into a wretched hovel?"

"Yes."

"What did the maiden do?"

"Nearly cried her eyes out."

"It must have been a great shock to her," he said solemnly, "musn't it?"

"Noll, you are certainly the most absurd person that ever lived. What earthly difference does it make what it was to her?"

"But what do you think?"

"Of course it was a dreadful shock."

"Poor wretch! she may have died of a broken heart."

"No doubt she would if every thing hadn't been changed back again."

"Was, then, every thing changed back again?"

"Certainly: nobody would be foolish enough to write a fairy-story, and leave it like that."

"Very true: what a pity real wrongs cannot be righted by a magic ring or wand, or something of that sort!"

"Hush!" exclaimed Helen, seizing him by the arm, and giving him a little shake, "you almost frighten me: you come in here with that woe-begone face, and go to talking about fairy-stories, as though they were the most real things in life. An out-and-out lunatic couldn't do any thing more grew-some."

"What would you have done if you had been the maiden?" asked Noll, unheeding the criticism.

"I should have run away as fast as I could go."

"Good God! do not — do not talk so lightly!" he exclaimed, starting up, and pacing the floor.

"Noll, I shall call mother if you go on so: you scare me almost to death," she cried, with a look of genuine alarm.

He sat down at a distance from her, and groaned aloud. She looked at him wonderingly.

"My dear," he said at length, getting up and coming towards her, "it is no fairy-tale: it is the truth."

"Sit down, please, and do not talk so: has any thing happened to you?"

"Yes."

"When will the time come that you can tell me?"

"It has come now."

"And are you going to tell me?"

"Yes."

She moved close to his side, took his hand, and gazed into his face with breathless interest. He looked at her for a moment in silence, as if controlling himself to speak.

"Darling."

"Yes."

"You are the maiden" —

"I?"

"I was the prince" —

"What do you mean?"

"And I am" —

"Noll! Noll!"

"The beggar!"

"What dreadful thing are you saying? I can make nothing of such queer talk."

"It is simply the story."

"But why cannot you speak plainly?"

"Do you not see yet?" he cried at length, as if driven to the wall. "Why, 'tis very clear: it lies in a nutshell. We have lost the case, — our case. We have lost all; and I am ruined, penniless, a pauper! Ha, ha! is not the tale a pretty one? and am I not interesting in the *role* of the prince — no, the beggar, I mean, or we will say both?"

"Why, Noll, I — I am — dreadfully sorry." Helen turned a little pale in sympathy with the extreme agitation of the speaker, but otherwise she was surprisingly calm.

"Where are all those beautiful castles we have been building in the air? Where are all those golden visions of future things we were to do and be? Where is

the future itself? Where is the palace, my darling, and where is the prince?"

"It is terrible!" said Helen composedly.

"But," continued Noll, anxiously studying the tranquil face before him, "the beggar has no right to what belongs to the prince."

"Do not talk in that way any more, Noll," she said seriously.

"What way?"

"About the beggar and the prince."

"I thought, my dear, it would help us through with what we have to say."

"I do not understand it," said Helen impatiently.

"Forgive me, darling! I hardly dared to trust myself to say it more clearly," he began in his old, simple, manly way, with his forehead leaned upon his hand, and his elbow resting on his knee. "It seems so like probing to the quick, so like a dissecting of our living, beating hearts, — such cruel work."

She looked at him intently, anxiously, with an air of suspense rather than of agitation. With his head still leaned upon his hand, and his eyes rooted to the floor, he went on, —

"I cannot say any word to make you more conscious of how precious you are to me, — how necessary to my happiness and my life. These past years of our intercourse have been a mockery if they have not made you more sensible of this than any spoken words can do. I need not say how intolerable seems the loneliness and the horror of the life I am about to propose to myself. I am sure I need not say to you that I have striven with all my power to keep the question of self out of my thought and resolve; that what I suggest is suggested for your sake; that what I do is done only for you. My dear, dear girl, I have come to-night" —

His voice was drowned in a low, choking sob, and for several moments he was unable to proceed.

"I have come to-night," he at length continued, "to give you back your freedom; to give up those claims upon you that have been dearer than my own life; to absolve you from all promises you have made to me; to send you back again into the world to follow your own bright, free, happy way, unhampered by my companionship, unshadowed by the clouds that lower about my path."

He paused. He did not turn his eyes upon her, but sat waiting in strained suspense for her to speak. In the dead silence that ensued, the silvery ticking of the French clock upon the chimney-piece must have sounded like the clanging of bells.

Her voice, when it came, was clear and sweet and unfaltering. She spoke slowly, choosing her words with care.

"Why, Noll, I am so surprised! I—I hardly know what to say. It doesn't seem as though I could give you up. I cannot tell you how sorry I am for you. I pity you with all my heart. Oh, dear! it seems dreadfully hard that you should have such trouble, and after all this waiting too. I am willing to do what you say if—if you insist upon it; but it is such a disappointment—so terrible for both of us. I don't know what to say. It must be perfectly shocking to have all your plans and habits altered so. I declare, I don't see how you bear it. You don't know how I pity you. Oh, I hope you will not be real poor, and ever really have to suffer! Oh, dear, dear! it is terrible to think of giving you up. It will seem so strange without you! I shall miss you dreadfully. Oh! what will mamma say? She will be perfectly overcome. I don't wonder you were blue: why didn't you tell me before? How long have you known it?"

He sat looking at the same spot on the floor. His face was ashen pale. Once or twice he trembled from head to foot. He listened to every word with an in-

tense interest, as though each syllable was being branded in upon his memory.. He sat for a moment after she had ceased speaking, then rose without a word, and approached the door.

"Why, Noll, you are not going without bidding me good-by! Oh, do not go so! And mamma too — she will be dreadfully hurt!"

He turned upon her a white, blank face, moved his lips inaudibly, then seized his hat, and hurried from the house.

The prince had gone. The palace had vanished into thin air. The astounded maiden started at the sound of the closing door, and listened anxiously to the echo of the retreating footsteps, as she paced up and down with a little wrinkle knit in her fair white brow. Pausing presently in front of the large mirror, she noted the little wrinkle, and smoothed it carefully away with her dainty hand.

CHAPTER X.

ATMOSPHERES.

FIFTEEN pounds to the square inch, the *savants* tell us, the material atmosphere weighs down upon our human flesh and blood and tissue; but this is the ideal atmosphere,—the atmosphere in its native purity. Let some chemist now tell us the weight of the modern municipal atmosphere of smoke and soot and dust and effluvia; let some philosopher add to this the pressure—equally real if less tangible—of the moral atmosphere of selfishness, remorse, and unatoned-for sin, the social atmosphere of poverty, loneliness, or uncongenial companionship; and a vivid imagination begins to realize the aggregate load borne by millions of groaning humanity.

All these various atmospheres, with their cumulative weight, brood over Pike's Court; and life there is a hard struggle, an endless struggle, that begins anew with each day's light, and ends not until man's best angel—sleep—snatches the harassed victims away, for a few hours, into oblivion.

But the pilgrims are used to the burden; it is a part of their pilgrimage: and they trudge along, for the most part uncomplainingly, and make little talk of it. Now and then one drops out of the ranks; and the others passing cast around a tired look of pity, and go their ways unto the day whose light shall see themselves go down.

The burden has long been too heavy for poor Liz Piverton. Year by year she has been slowly sinking under it. It has, by turns, crushed out her hope, her cheer, her ambition, her energy; and now there is little

left, — a poor, fragile frame; a weak, peevish voice, and a spirit of jaded, hopeless indifference. From the chair to the sofa, from the sofa to the bed, ever through the weary days, ever through the sleepless nights, the burden has been pressing mercilessly down, down, down, until now there is but one more move.

And one dark Monday morning Joe came to his sister's bedside, and saw a change. Her voice was weaker, her eyes more listless. She would not eat. He tempted her with every delicacy he could think of, but in vain. He looked at her a few minutes anxiously, and left the room in alarm. It was the first time he had ever thought of her life being in danger. As her hope had declined, his had grown and flourished; he had felt bound to keep enough for both: it was the one star in the firmament to him, and it shone with no glimmering, far-off ray; it was near and warm, it was bright and rosy; it promised all, — meat, drink, raiment, health, wealth, and happiness, as the reward of patient waiting. Without it the sordid details of actual existence would have been insupportable; with it, he dwelt in marble halls, with vassals and serfs by his side. What though five and twenty years of life had come and gone already, and brought nothing of these bright possibilities? yet the faith never wavered in Joe's stout, sanguine heart, that in the end somehow, somewhere, to him and Liz would come the day of health, compensation, and content.

But now his eyes suddenly opened to another possibility. A cloud swept across his star: his air-castles came tumbling down in overwhelming ruin. He ran for the doctor: the doctor came and looked, and shook his head, and said it was only a question of a few days, and perhaps hours. Joe felt a sudden and agonizing pinch at his heart: he felt himself seized in the stern, relentless clutch of the actual, and shaken out of a long, delusive dream.

Meantime Liz must be cared for. The medicines

and comforts prescribed by the doctor must be procured. Joe thought of his empty pockets in dismay. There was but one resource,— Mr. Ferrette. Joe hastened down to the office with much misgiving: his only hope lay in the urgency of the case, and the fact that his employer owed him a large sum of money.

Popsy looked at him in surprise when he entered. It was past noon. He said that Mr. Ferrette was very much enraged at his absence, and at being obliged to go to court himself. Joe hurriedly explained his situation to the sympathetic junior, and set out in search of Mr. Ferrette. He met him on the street, walking with a client, and was greeted with an angry scowl as he approached; but necessity emboldened Joe to walk up and state his case. It was in the presence of the client. Mr. Ferrette was on guard. He expressed surprise and sympathy, regretted that he was not able to give him his money there and then, and bade him come to the office the next morning. Bitterly disappointed at the delay, Joe had no resource but to wait. His friends were few: his credit was small, and it was exhausted when he had borrowed a few dollars from the little cobbler to buy comforts for his sister.

The next day, and for several succeeding days, Joe followed hard upon the trail of Mr. Nicholas Ferrette; but that busy and absent-minded gentleman was neither to be found, nor had he thought to leave an answer to the daily urgent notes which Joe addressed to him.

Meantime things grew worse and worse at home. Liz grew steadily weaker. Joe sat by her bedside day and night, save the time spent in running to and fro after his employer. Forced to beg the necessaries which he could not buy for his dying sister, his heart was divided between rage and grief. He saw the end fast approaching,— how to meet the expenses which in a few hours would be needful! He determined to make a last effort.

He at length found Mr. Ferrette at court. He con-

fronted him in the midst of a group of his brother-attorneys. In a burst of rage, that amiable person bade him come to the office later in the day, and be d—d.

With no other alternative, Joe once more disconsolately turned his steps homeward. Liz visibly declined that day. Sometimes she seemed to have stopped breathing. Joe brought up the cobbler to sit with her while he went to keep his appointment with Mr. Ferrette. He expected a scene, but he was reckless of what might happen. With his mind filled with thoughts of his sister, he cared not what might come to himself. He entered the office with firm step and resolute bearing. He glanced through the open door into the inner room : Mr. Ferrette was not there.

"He's gone out, but he left something for you," said Popsy. "You nearly caught him this time. He darted out in a great hurry, for fear he should meet you on the stairs."

With natural misgiving Joe went into the inner room, and picked up an envelope directed to him, on which the ink was still wet. He opened it quickly. It contained a ten-dollar bill, and a letter enclosing another small slip of paper. Joe eagerly read the letter. It was short enough : —

MR. JOSEPH PIVERTON.

Sir, — Herewith enclosed you will find the full amount of my indebtedness to you. Having thus squared our account, I take this opportunity to inform you that I shall no longer need your services, and I hereby forbid you entering my office on any pretext after this date. You will do well not to send anybody to me for a reference as to your character.

Yours, etc.,

NICHOLAS FERRETTE.

Joe finished the letter. It was clearly enough expressed, certainly ; but he had seen in it only one astounding, inexplicable sentence.

"The full amount of my indebtedness to you,"

he repeated, gazing at the single ten-dollar bill. At that moment he noticed the other slip of paper, which had fallen to the table. He took it up. It was a promissory note for two hundred and ninety dollars, "*payable in three years, not negotiable.*"

Joe crushed letter, note, and bankbill together in his hand, and struck the table with his clenched fist. For one moment he seemed unable to contain his wrath; the next he seated himself at the table, seized a pen, and looked about for a sheet of paper. In his hasty search he turned over a folded document. The indorsement upon it caught his eye, — "Jacob Blau, to Nicholas Ferrette." It was a deed. Forgetful of his own purpose, Joe opened and hastily examined it. He grew pale; his breath came quickly; he turned nervously to the last page. It was not yet executed, but had been carefully prepared. In his hurry Mr. Ferrette had forgotten it. Joe took out his pocket-book, and made a memorandum of its contents. The discovery of a piece of astounding villany for a moment made him forget his own misery. He went into the other room to speak to Popsy. The junior was engaged with a client. Joe accordingly said good-by, and darted from the room. He almost flew over the road homeward. He climbed the rickety stairs, two steps at a time. Liz was still alive; nay, she was for the moment comfortable: she had fallen asleep. Joe hurriedly whispered in the cobbler's ear to remain a few minutes longer, and disappeared from the room. He ran up the court to the end. He stood before the door of the "dépôt," and rang the bell. He had been there before on errands to Miss Badger. An office-boy opened the door. Without a word Joe darted past him, up the stairs, and into the little sitting-room. Miss Badger and her mother were seated quietly sewing. They looked up in surprise at his sudden entrance. He stopped to take breath, and take off his hat.

"Miss Badger," he said at length, "has the sale come off yet, in 'Badger *agst.* Gould'?"

"Yes."

"Has the sheriff paid over the money?"

"I don't think he has," said Miss Badger, with damp composure, as she looked at her visitor curiously.

"Then look out for yourself!"

"Eh!" exclaimed Mrs. Badger, while her daughter sat mute with darkening eyes.

"Don't let him ever pay that money to Mr. Ferrette!"

"I don't eggzactly see how I can help it," said Miss Badger flatly, as she knotted her thread.

"You'd better try," continued Joe, turning to go: "I advise you to be moving in the matter."

"'T seems to me rather queer that a clerk of Mr. Ferrette's should come to tell me such a thing as that," said Miss Badger, looking at Joe suspiciously.

"I am no longer in his service; but it would have made no difference in this case if I had been," said Joe shortly.

"P'r'aps you have quarrelled with him?" said Miss Badger in the same tone.

"Yes — no: I have left his office."

"Oh!"

Joe moved hurriedly to the door.

"Stop, young man!" cried Mrs. Badger. "I want to know what this means. It's all a muddle!"

"I can't stop."

"You must stop; I want this explained."

"No, no, really I cannot. I have a sister who is sick — very sick — dying, in fact. I must go to her."

"Why, you don't say!" exclaimed Mrs. Badger with a touch of genuine feeling: "I'm very sorry you're in trouble, young man."

The sudden revulsion was too much for Joe. He burst into tears at this unexpected word of sympathy.

"There, there, don't you take on: perhaps she'll git well. While there's life there's hope. Go right along ef you must. I wish you hed time, though, to explain this business 'bout the sheriff, for I can't see what it means."

"I know what it means, mother," said Miss Badger, with mild confidence.

Joe said no more, but hurried home to relieve the kind-hearted little cobbler. Liz was still asleep. Joe hung over her anxiously. A feeble hope began to arise within him, that this slumber, so long, so peaceful, might prove a turning-point to the invalid, and that she was going to get well. This fledgling hope was fast putting out its timid wings, when Liz at length stirred, and slowly opened her eyes. She saw her brother's anxious, inquiring look, and smiled. In an instant Joe's homely face beamed all over with delight. Liz had not smiled before for months. It was the old happy smile of years and years ago. Joe could scarcely contain his joy. She moved her lips. He bent over to catch her words.

"Joe."

"Yes, Liz."

"It's all gone."

"What's gone?"

"The weight."

"Weight, Liz, — you feel better?"

Poor Joe! The crushing burden had done its work. It was fast slipping from the weary shoulders. The pilgrimage was almost over.

"Oh, so much better! I am so light here," she said, feebly moving the hand that lay upon her breast.

"Yes, yes," said Joe, in an awed whisper, as the truth began to dawn upon him, and he sank upon one knee beside the bed. "Are you happy, Liz?"

"Yes."

She smiled again, and shut her eyes. Opening them presently, she whispered more feebly, —

"It seems like a dreadful dream."

"What does?"

"That I never really lived it. It seems as if I were a child again. O Joe!" —

"Yes, Liz."

"If it *is* true, I have been very selfish" —

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Joe with a stifled sob.

"And you have been an — an angel to me, Joe."

Joe buried his face in the bedclothes, and sobbed uncontrollably. The rich guerdon of appreciation for years of patient, uncomplaining service had come at last, — unexpected, heaven-sent. It overflowed the cup of expectation; it filled the unexact heart with intolerable grief and joy. The dying girl placed her wasted hand upon her brother's bowed head. He lay long under its blessed caress — trembling to disturb it. It was the last touch. The pilgrimage was done. The burden had fallen; and to the freed victim all the atmospheres — moral, social, physical — of this mortal life were impotencies forevermore.

CHAPTER XI.

GREEK MEETS GREEK.

IT is early in the morning, yet Mr. Nicholas Ferrette is already closeted with a client,—a very particular client, one would say; for although they are alone, and the door is securely latched, their chairs are drawn close together, and they are whispering in each other's ears.

Mr. Ferrette's client is not at first view prepossessing: he is a big, squat man, with a low, concave forehead, bristling hair, small, cunning eyes, and a big mouth. He talks with a German accent: he seems impatient.

"It's all right, I tell you," says Mr. Ferrette reassuringly.

"Oh, all a-right, all a-right! every dings is all a-right: dot is easy to say. Haf I make pargain mit you, or haf I not, eh?"

"Yes, yes, of course; but"—

"Haf I not keep dot pargain? Haf I not go to dot sale, an' puy dot broproperty?"

"Yes, yes: you did, and"—

"Haf I not bay down dot money, *Gott im Himmel?*" he continued, striking the desk with his clenched fist; "von hundret vifty, seexty, most two hundret thousand tollar, out of mine pocket."

"Sh-h! yes, yes, I say," returned Mr. Ferrette, looking around nervously; "and the sheriff's got the money all safe in his vaults; and he gave you a deed conveying the land and the stores, so you're perfectly secured."

"Bah!" exclaimed the German, with an oath: "vat

do I vant mit his land an his shtores? Vat do I vant mit his tam deed? I vant de money."

"And you're going to have it, I tell you. Look here, now, Blau," cried the attorney impatiently, "listen to me; be a little reasonable! The sheriff has the money; he will pay it over to me to-day: I will hand it to you; you will execute the deed to me, and the whole thing's done. See," he continued, opening the portfolio upon his desk, and taking up the paper that caused Joe such a shock, "here it is: here is the deed, Jacob Blau to Nicholas Ferrette, all made out ready to sign.

"Ya-as," said the German, with an ugly wink: "dere ees de deed, unt de sheriff haf dot money vat I bay him; but vere is dot odder money?"

"Eh?"

"Eh, eh, eh?" repeated the client mockingly: "you don' know vat I mean. No? you don' remember dot leetle, vat-you-call ponus, dot tree tausend toller, eh?"

"What? Oh! Why, of course," stammered the attorney, momentarily embarrassed under the searching glance of his visitor, "that's all right."

"So? dot's gut den: you vill pay it right away down to-day, mit dot odder money for de land, eh?"

"Why, yes,—no; that is, not exactly to-day. I expected to; expected it in yesterday; some man owed me a bill, promised to pay without fail; just my d—d luck; but that'll be all right; that'll be all perfectly right, I tell you; I'm sure to have it in two or three days, and I'll hand it to you as soon as it comes in."

"Ha, you don' say!" sneered the German; "two, tree days? Ya-as; vell, that von't do!"

"What do you mean?"

"No, no, my fine young friend! I haf it now, dot leetle ponus, or I sign not dot deed."

"Look here, Blau!" exclaimed Mr. Ferrette, start-

ing up, and spreading out his hands with an appealing gesture of confidence and frankness. "What is all this scare about? Do you mean to say you're suspicious of *me*? The money shall be paid, I tell you; there's some mistake about it; I don't understand why it didn't come in; accidents will happen; but I shall have it in a few days, and it shall be paid, I tell you. Haven't I always done the square thing by you?"

"Skvare? Ugh, ya-as; everypody is skvare mit Yacob Blau,—unt Vy!" he cried sharply. Then, squinting up his eyes and nodding his head emphatically, he continued, "*P*ecause he keep *always* his eye open, an' dakes care of his own pesness."

"Ha, ha! You're a sharp one, Blau!" exclaimed the attorney, suddenly tacking, and assuming one of his old smiles. "That's right; look out for number one! Yes, yes; that's the only way; this is a wicked world. But about this little matter, we'd better fix it all up to-day. I'll go right away now to the sheriff, and get the money: we'll pass the deed as soon as I get back; and then, as for that little balance for the bonus, I'll hand it to you, as I said before, in a day or two; that'll be all right. I'll give you security if you want. What'll you have, a policy on my life, or a mortgage on my house?"

Just what effect this adroit speech might have produced upon the brewer, it is impossible to say; for at this moment a sharp, imperative voice was heard in the outer room, asking,—

"Where is Mr. Ferrette?"

Before any one could answer or interfere, the door was unceremoniously burst open, and the minion of the most important man in the city strode swiftly in, dropped a note upon the table before Mr. Ferrette, and said shortly, as he turned to go,—

"That demands instant attention."

Ferrette took the note, tore it open, and began to

read with a half smile of expectancy. His face underwent a sudden and frightful change before he had finished the few lines which follow : —

SHERIFF'S OFFICE, CITY OF NEW YORK.

SIR, — I am ordered to show cause why an injunction should not issue to restrain me from paying over to you the money realized from the sale in the matter of "*Badger agst. Gould.*" Be on hand to defend the motion in the superior court chambers this morning at ten o'clock ! My counsel will be there to confer with you.

Yours, etc.,

Ferrette turned deadly pale, crushed the letter in his hand, and sprang from the table with a fearful oath.

"Vat is dot?" asked the German ; the impatience and anger in his face giving place to a look of intense curiosity.

The attorney tried to speak ; for a moment his voice failed him ; there was a rattling in his throat ; he seemed stifling ; then, seizing his hat, he cried hoarsely, as he rushed from the room, —

"Wait here till I come back."

Worthy Jacob Blau did wait : he got very tired waiting. A quarter of an hour, a half-hour, passed. Mr. Blau walked up and down the room ; he picked up the morning's paper, he threw it down ; he went a great many times to the window ; he looked quite as often at his watch ; he went out, and vainly questioned the clerks as to Mr. Ferrette's errand and agitation. An hour passed : he seated himself with a muttered oath, and took out a large pocket memorandum-book marked "*Blau's Brewery,*" and began to study the entries. Another half-hour passed, when, at length, quick steps were heard in the hall.

Mr. Ferrette came into the room like a tornado. In the brief space of time he had been absent, his face had grown seamed and haggard with passion. He

flung his hat and papers to the floor, slammed the door after him, and walked the floor with violence.

"Vell," cried the brewer with exhausted patience. "You say 'vait,' and I vaited, unt I get tired vaiting. Ven you don't come shust now, I vait no longer."

In his present excitement the attorney was so utterly oblivious of, or indifferent to, the German, that the latter's impatience presently yielded to curiosity, and he asked, —

"Vat is it? Vat you haf, eh?"

"It's that she-devil," shrieked Ferrette, whirling around, and shaking his clenched fist. "She's robbed me, she's ruined me, she's cheated me out of my honest pay! I've worked and toiled and sweat and struggled and fought for her for years, and this is what I get for it! She's taken the money out of my pocket; she's taken the bread out of my mouth!" he concluded with a volley of fearful oaths.

"Dot vooman: she gets de money from the sheriff?" asked the German, almost breathless.

"No, d—n her, not yet; but she's going to."

"Eh? How vas dot?"

"She applied for an injunction."

"Vell!"

"To prevent the sheriff paying over the money to me."

"Ha! She schmell de rat."

"She got that d—d villain that I kicked out of my office, that thief Piverton, to swear against me! The dirty spy had rifled my desk, and been through my papers: he found the deed, and blowed on us."

"He haf tolc *my* name, eh?"

"I don't know; what odds? they've nosed it all out. That cursed loafer, I'll" —

Here the enraged man poured out a long, incoherent tirade of profanity on the head of his departed clerk, while the brewer sat quietly in his chair buried in thought. At length he asked anxiously, —

"Vere is de money now?"

"Paid into court: the judge wouldn't grant an injunction, but he ordered the money paid into court."

"So?" said the brewer with a sigh of relief; "unden?"

Mr. Ferrette had thrown himself in his chair, and sat sullenly stabbing his blotter without answer.

"Pay into court? vat means dot? Somebody must get it— who?"

The scowling attorney, still making raw wounds in his blotter, did not answer.

"Vat you say? *Gott im Himmel*, vy you no shpeak? Somebody get de money; de shudge no get it. Vat you do?"

"I've got to present my bill to the court," said Ferrette from between his clenched teeth.

"So?" exclaimed the German, nodding his head significantly, and regarding his companion with a queer look. "The shudge shall dake care of dot leetle ding!"

"But," cried Ferrette, springing to his feet with a sudden spasm of rage. "I'll see them all d—d first! I'll fight them tooth and nail. I'll follow her like a bloodhound. I'll make them wish they had never been born!"

As the furious little lawyer stood before the burly brewer, and, with bloodshot eyes, and in a voice hoarse with passion, poured forth an inarticulate gable of vituperation, the latter viewed him with an expression which visibly changed, with the slow movement of his intelligence, from indifference and suspicion to aversion and contempt.

"Ugh!" he said at length with icy hardness. "So you don't got dot money? You don't keep dot leetle pargain?"

So occupied had Ferrette been with his own chagrin, that he had evidently quite forgotten the disappointment of the German; and when now reminded of the

unwelcome fact in this exasperating manner, it transported him with a fresh access of fury quite beyond all power of speech: he could not even pronounce an oath; he was a frightful spectacle as he stood rigid in the middle of the floor, glaring like a furious beast, his dumb lips white with the foam of rage.

"Vere I go now for my money? Vere I go now for dot leetle ponus?" continued the brewer in the same mocking tone.

"Go to hell!" shrieked the attorney with recovered breath.

"Ya-as, unt I vait dere for you, eh! I shall not vait long. You tink I vistle for my money. Ugh! Ve see. It ees you shall vistle, mine friend—a tam pig long vistle! Ha! dot odder vooman ees petter lawyer as you: she shall teach you some tricks! Goot day. I vait for you in dot place vat you tole me!"

Without waiting for an answer, the German went his way. The startled clerks directly after heard a heavy fall in the inner room, and, rushing in, beheld their employer writhing with convulsions upon the floor.

CHAPTER XII.

A QUIET BARGAIN.

THE dépôt bell rings sharply. A stranger to see Miss Badger. He is shown up-stairs, and finds that lady and her mother seated at their work. He is a big, squat man, with a low, concave forehead, bristling hair, small, cunning eyes, and a big mouth. He talks with a German accent.

"Mees Padger?"

"That is my name."

"So?" he exclaims with an astonished stare at the unimposing person before him. "Vell, I haf come to see you 'bout dot leetle ting ve haf togedder."

Miss Badger looks curious.

"I haf bought dot broperty for you, mine young friend."

"For me?"

"Ya-as, dot Tamen's Row, or vat you call it."

"Nobody has bought any thing for me," said Miss Badger, composedly threading a needle.

"Eh?"

"You have made a mistake in the person."

"Ugh! mebbe not: I make no meestake like dot."

"I don't know you."

"So? Vell, I know you: dot is shust as gut, eh?"

"You are mistaken. I am not the person you want."

"You tink so? Shtop a vile. You haf a pig case down at the court, eh?"

Miss Badger carefully refrained from assent.

"You vin dot case: you beats dot odder barty. No?"

Miss Badger maintained a safe silence. Her mother,

seated upon the very edge of her chair, levelled her gleaming spectacles at the stranger, and demanded sharply, —

“Well, s’pose she did?”

“Mother!”

“Ah-h! I haf made meestake, eh? Ve see! De sheriff seize dot barty’s broperty. He vant to sell. Nopody vill buy. Nopody has de money. You tink it vill be fine ting to haf dot broperty for yourself, mine young friend: you send mine odder fine leetle friend, Meester F’ret, to ole Yacob Blau to come buy dot broperty for his two fine young friends. Meester Blau shake hees head: he haf not so moch money. Mine fine young friends say, ‘You can borrow it.’ Meester Blau shake hees head. Mine fine friends say, ‘Ve vant dot broperty; ve must have dot broperty; ve make you grand offer, Meester Blau, — ve gif you tausend tollar; you shall buy him vrom de sheriff for us, an’ ve vill buy him right avay pack again, an’ gif you dot tausend tollars. Eh?’ Meester Blau shake again hees head. Mine fine young friends say, ‘Two tausend.’ Meester Blau shakes always hees head. Mine fine young friends say, ‘Tree tausend.’ Meester Blau shtops; he lofe hees fine young friends; he says endlich, ‘Yaas.’ An’ so he buy dot broperty; he pay dot money; an’ now he come an’ vant hees fine young friends to pay it pack mit dot tree tausend tollar vot you know about.”

Miss Badger did not speak: she looked intently at her visitor. Her eyes had changed from whitish gray to coal black during the interview. Her mother answered for her.

“V’lumny don’t know nothin’ ’bout all that.”

“Eh?”

“My daughter don’t know what you mean by all that rigmarole. She don’t know nothin’ ’bout it. She aint goin’ to hold herself responsible for every thing that rascally lawyer does.”

"Oho! You don' tell me. You look ver' sharp mit your glasses, mine friend: you talk ver' loud mit your tongue. An' so Mees Badger is a shmall, leetle girl tied to your hapron-shtring, eh? An' she don know noting 'bout it? No? Vot a pity!"

"An' she don't want to; an' she don't want to be questioned about her affairs, what's more, an' she don't propose to be. She hain't got her money yet, but when she does she'll hang on to it, you may count on that; an' if you or anybody else has made a bargain with that blackleg of a lawyer, you'd better pack off, and fix it up with *him*!"

"Look a' here, ole vooman, who talks to you? Shut up your vind-bag! You vill not shcare me mit your pig vorts!" cried the German with a menacing air.

"I order you out of my house," retorted the undaunted Mrs. Badger, "and I will have you put out too, if" —

"Mother!"

Miss Badger, who had sat silent and busily thinking during the foregoing colloquy, now interposed in her meekest manner: —

"I'd like to say a few words to the gentleman, if you please."

The German looked at her with undisguised contempt.

"Are you Mr. Blau?"

"Ya-as."

"Did you furnish all the money?"

"Never min' for dot. I buy de broperty for you."

"What makes you want to sell it back?"

"Eh?"

"Isn't the property worth the money?"

"Ya-as: it ees vorth more as dot."

A sudden look of interest dawned in Miss Badger's face, a brightening of the eyes, a working of the muscles of the mouth, as though the last words had awakened in her a new idea.

"Why don't you keep it, then?" she asked in her most protracted drawl, with her eyes cast down upon her work.

"Vy? Because I can make more brofit mit my money in odder tings. Don' you see?"

"Oh!"

"Ven you get dot money, eh?"

"When the court pays it to me, I s'pose," said Miss Badger innocently.

"So? Den you vant to carry out dot leetle par-gain?"

"I never made any bargain."

"Oh! it vas dot odder man, eh? Vot a pity!"

"I couldn't ever pay you any such sum as three thousand dollars."

"No? Den I guess I keep dot broperty."

"Hem!" coughed Miss Badger, moving in her seat, "I might perhaps take it, an' pay you a little something more'n you give."

"You don' say?"

"A thousand dollars perhaps."

"V'lumny, are you takin' leave of your senses? What on earth d'you want with that property?"

"Vell, I guess I petter keep him, after all."

"Yes, I s'pose you had," said Miss Badger, rising and going over to the cactus.

"Dot vooman, she vas a great lady, I hear, vat owned dot broperty: perhaps she vill buy it her-self," said Mr. Blau, casting a cunning look at Miss Badger.

"Well, go and sell it to her, then, an' don't talk any more about it! V'lumny don't want it, an' that's settled."

The German cast a malicious glance at Mrs. Badger.

Miss Badger impassively dusted the cactus-leaves. The German rose, and approached the door muttering, —

"I vill go to dot lady."

Miss Badger coughed : she seemed a little agitated at the movement.

"I don't see," she said, dividing her attention between her plant and her visitor, "what Mr. Ferrette meant by making such a bargain : why don't you go to him?"

"I go vere de money ees. I t'inks it vas here. I haf made meestake. I vill go to some odder beeples."

"Hem!" coughed Miss Badger, "I might perhaps give you a very little more."

"Ver' leetle? Ugh! Dot means noting. How moch?"

"Well, I don't see how I can, but what if we should say — mother, 'n' I — fifteen hundred?"

"Damn! Take it along!"

"What?"

"You shall haf him."

"When?"

"Shust venever you like ; send me vort ven you pe ready. Eh?"

He seized his hat, and was gone. Miss Badger hovered about the cactus for hours afterward, without apparently hearing a word her mother said.

CHAPTER XIII.

DREGS.

IT had been a dreary day, with no morning freshness, no noontide glow, no evening tenderness. Cold gray clouds shut out the sky, cold gray mists hugged the earth; a universal grayness wrapped the world, and, no doubt, wrought its chilling way into many weak human hearts and hopes not fortified by a vigorous circulation, good digestive organs, and a comfortable balance at the banker's.

Twelve changeless hours of such an earth, and such a sky, rolled their slow course away, till, towards night-fall, the clouds reached the point of over-saturation, and the welcome rain began to fall.

Mrs. Gould, looking from the drawing-room window, saw her son driving up the avenue — coming home after a week's absence. With an anxious face she turned, and surveyed the room. Every thing that care and forethought could do to fight the battle of cheer against gloom had been done. The bright fire flaming in the grate; the easy-chairs drawn up on either side; the dinner-table, seen through a half-opened door, shining with silver and napery; nay, even her own dress, made a thought more rich and dainty for the occasion, — showed how much the mother had her son in mind. If her longing for his approach was mingled with a little dread, she did not let it appear. She met him at the door with the same cordial, welcoming smile, the same firm, hearty hand-shake, that had greeted him since, when a boy, he had come home, weary and play-worn, to her maternal care.

As his health and comfort had been, with her, a daily

study for years, it was not likely she would fail to remark his present white, weary haggardness. But she made no remark: she helped him off with his coat, took his parcels, and talked the while about the weather, business, and home affairs.

She brought him in to the fire for a warming, sent him up to change his clothes, and had dinner served directly he came down. She protracted the meal as much as possible, talking quietly and cheerfully of the news of the week. There was no sparkle nor glitter nor rush to Mrs. Gould's cheerfulness. She could not have been voluble: it was the cheerfulness of strong sense and sympathy; vitalized by a steadfast courage and loyalty, and not the mere breath of words nor the vain noise of laughter.

The colonel, without intent, seconded Mrs. Gould by discussing business and politics, when they were seated, after dinner, about the fire. His mother must have seen that Noll was harassed by these topics requiring attention and argument; but she did not interfere: perhaps she thought it was best so.

The colonel, however, soon went away to write in the library. Naomi betook herself to the piano, and Mrs. Gould was left alone with her son. She did not plague him with attention: she sat knitting, and speaking now and then, as she thought of any thing to say.

The storm, meanwhile, had grown serious. The rain came down like a flood; the wind gradually shifted from north to north-east, and blew a gale. Naomi, at the piano, played, as if in harmony with the storm, an improvisation in minor chords, that sounded like a prolonged wail. The combined influences of the evening were evidently bearing severely upon Mrs. Gould, despite her self-control. She suddenly straightened up in her chair, and called out to Naomi, —

"There, there, my dear, do stop that: it is horrible! I think we have had enough music for to-night."

Naomi stopped instantly, but looked shocked and

hurt. Mrs. Gould had never spoken to her in that way about her music. It happened just then that Noll unconsciously heaved a deep sigh. In the momentary stillness it was audible the length of the room: it barely escaped being a groan. Naomi started, and came instantly forward, saying, —

"Something is the matter with you, cousin Oliver."

As all warning signs were, of course, lost upon Naomi, Mrs. Gould rose quickly, crossed the room, and touched her. Luckily, Noll had not heeded.

Col. Gould now came in to say good-night. Naomi quickly followed him, and Mrs. Gould had her son to herself. She mended the fire, drew the curtains closer, and silently resumed her knitting. She did not talk; she knew the fruitlessness of talk: she knew that, sooner or later, he must have it out with himself. One thing only she did: she went and called his dog. The faithful creature came rushing in, and bounded all over his master. In one minute his marvellous instinct told him something was wrong. He became suddenly quiet, laid his head in Noll's lap, and sat with upturned, patient eyes, waiting for the coveted caress. He was not disappointed. The dumb brute proved a comfort: he had not to be talked to.

Midnight, one o'clock, two o'clock passed, and still Mrs. Gould sat knitting, and mending the fire. She chose not to send her son to a sleepless bed: she chose not to leave him alone. He had forgotten to smoke. She noticed it, and herself brought him a cigar.

Presently he began to show signs of weariness. During her long watch Mrs. Gould had been thinking: she had decided to speak.

Nothing so well showed her excellent wisdom as the few words she exchanged with her son before they went to bed. Her purpose was evident enough: she wanted to let him know that she was close by him in his struggle; to open up the subject enough to have

him feel at liberty to talk about it with her if he felt inclined.

"You didn't write me, Noll, during the week."

"No."

"I expected you would."

"I didn't feel like it."

"I have been very anxious about you."

"I am sorry."

"Did you see Helen?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Gould asked no more questions. There was a long pause, during which each sat silently gazing at the fire. Noll at length rose, stood before his mother, and looked her calmly in the face, as he said with a tired, husky voice, —

"It is all over."

Mrs. Gould did not answer, or raise her eyes.

"It was I. I am accountable for every thing. She was as sweet and womanly as she has always been. She simply did what I asked her."

"I feared she would."

Mrs. Gould's tone was dry and cold. Noll looked at her with a troubled air, as if to deprecate any severity of judgment.

"She has written me since : here is what she says," he continued, opening a note, and handing it to his mother.

"I do not care to read it," she said in the same tone, still without looking up.

"It is only just to her," he pleaded.

Mrs. Gould took the note without another word, and read as follows : —

MY DEAREST NOLL, — I have thought and thought and cried and cried over what you said the other night. I did not realize it then. I do not half realize it now. Every thing seemed all in a whirl, and it seems so yet. You didn't look like yourself, or act like yourself ; and your strange talk about the prince and the beggar made it all seem so unreal and dreamlike, that I have not yet shaken off the impression.

"Oh! what shall I say to you? I do not know any better now than I did then. It seems dreadful to think of giving you up. It will be so strange, so unnatural, so like beginning life all over again somehow. I have had you so long, that I feel as if you belonged to me; and I am sure I shall never love anybody else half so well. I hope you will not forget me, and that you will come to see me just the same. How queer, how dreadful, it sounds, to be sending *you* such an invitation! What a pity it is we ever saw each other! Oh, dear, the world seems to be all full of suffering! I hope that you will not have much more of it. I hope you will be happy. I shall think of you, and pray for your happiness and prosperity; and you, I am sure, will not utterly forget your faithful

HELEN.

Noll stood gazing into his mother's face with an expression of painful anxiety, as she finished reading the note.

"You see, I have nothing to complain of," he said, repeating his former phrase, and in the same tone. "Remember that, old lady! Remember it was I that did it: I am accountable for every thing."

"Let us go to bed, Noll: it is three o'clock," was all his mother said in reply.

Twice during the ensuing week Mrs. Gould went to town for the night, and spent the evening with her son at his boarding-place. When at home she wrote him every day. She made no reference, either by word or letter, to what each had most at heart. She wrote, for the most part, upon business. Physically he went through the routine of existence with admirable regularity. His body, that is, went on its rounds as we have seen other bodies go, whose hearts were dead within them. Not that Noll's heart was dead: it was only paralyzed.

Mrs. Gould was conscious of all this, and she was not without a resource which she had wisely withheld to the last.

Saturday afternoon Noll came home earlier than he was expected. He found his mother talking to some

strangers upon the porch,—two men and a woman. From one of the former he heard, as he approached, the question, —

“How many acres have you?”

“Twenty,” answered Mrs. Gould.

“Mortgaged?”

“No.”

Turning to nod to his mother as he passed, Noll recognized in one of the strangers the auctioneer, constable, real-estate agent, and general factotum of the neighboring village.

He found no opportunity of asking an explanation of his mother during the evening, but she came to his room as usual just before going to bed.

“What’s up, old lady? you are not going to mortgage your house, I hope?”

“No.”

“What did those people want, then?”

“I came in to tell you: I have been meaning to do so for some time. I am going to sell the house.”

“You shall not do it!” cried Noll angrily, starting up in bed.

“I expected you would be disappointed.”

“I won’t have it done. You shall not sacrifice your comfort for the rest of your life. I will have a guardian appointed over you,” he continued emphatically.

“When you get through exclaiming, my boy” —

“I shall not get through exclaiming,” he went on impatiently. “I will hold no parley upon the question.”

“Do not be silly, my child: it is no longer a question to hold parley upon. I have already made a contract to sell it.”

“Then, you are a rash, foolish woman. You have no right to take such a step without consulting with your friends.”

“I have decided and carried into effect every important measure in my life thus far without calling in

my friends, and I do not think I shall begin now," said Mrs. Gould a little proudly.

"Did you consider that this place — our home — is now all that we have left?"

"I prize this spot and all its associations as much as you can ; but it is far from being all we have left."

"'Tis all that I care for."

"It will of course be a great trial at first."

"It is strange it did not occur to you, in the pride of your self-sufficiency, that carrying out your project might involve others' happiness and comfort, — might, in short, be a little selfish," said Noll bitterly.

"If I did not think you would repent such a charge after a little calm consideration, I should feel very much hurt by it. My dear boy, if you knew how long and painfully and carefully I have pondered this question, with a view, I hope, quite as much to your happiness as my own ; if you knew what reasons have chiefly induced me to take the step, — you would not, I am sure, reproach me on the score of my motives."

"Well, well, I take it back, old lady. I beg your pardon. I kiss your hands. I do not care. If you are satisfied, why, so am I. For a moment it smothered and choked me ; made me feel a little desperate, that's all. Go on, and do as you like."

"Noll, Noll, that tone is even worse than the other. I don't want to do as I like. I want to do as you like, as we both like, — to do for the best. I want to commend this step to your judgment.

"That you can never do !"

"Nay, more, — to make you see in it the surest means for our future comfort and content."

"You might as well try to prove that life is a blessing."

"You can, at least, listen with a little patience."

"Oh, yes ! but why talk ? The thing is done, you say. Let us waste no more breath over it, then. Let's trim our sails to the next breeze. No steps backward !

On with the dance ! Hurrah for the next man that dies !”

“I see,” said Mrs. Gould rising, “that I shall have to wait until you are in a more reasonable mood.”

“Hold !” cried her son, catching her by the arm. “I’m through. I have not another word to offer. Go on and talk as long as you like. I’m as reasonable now as I ever shall be.”

“You will only be quite reasonable when you have reflected upon the matter ; but I may as well say now what I have to say. I can do it in fifty words as well as five hundred. Do not suppose that this is a new question with me. I have long had it under consideration. I carefully estimated what our future income would be, and I saw it would be quite inadequate to keeping up so large and expensive a place. I shrank from the economical struggle of attempting more than we could do. Such a course is wearing, harassing, steadily downward. Home under such auspices would only be a sounding name, a burden, — a curse instead of a blessing. With the same means, to say nothing of the added funds from the sale of this house, we can live comfortably and happily in some humbler way. Such a step, moreover, will put us on a proper basis before the world : we shall not be constantly called on to meet social demands which our present false position makes imperative. The worldly respect that may be wanting to us in our altered circumstances, we can very well dispense with.”

“You make no account of my salary ?”

“Your present salary, is, as you know, barely sufficient for your personal needs.”

Noll attempted no further reply. His mother said “Good-night,” and withdrew.

Mrs. Gould carried out her plan without further opposition from her son. The preliminaries were already arranged. Two weeks from the date of the above conversation, when the train from New York

came up to the dépôt, Noll found his mother waiting for him upon the platform. The carriage was not there. She had come on foot. Suspecting the truth, he asked no questions. Taking her son's arm, Mrs. Gould led the way through the village, and upon its farther outskirts stopped at the gate of a neat little cottage. Aroused by the click of the latch, Noll's dog came bounding down the path to meet him. He looked up quickly at his mother as if about to speak, but checked himself. He followed on to the house, passed through the narrow hall into the little parlor, almost grazing his head as he entered. His mother was watching him anxiously. He swallowed a lump in his throat, caught her about the waist, and said, —

“No need of a wry face now, old lady. We've drained the cup, and got used to the bitter: this is only the dregs!”

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW HOME.

TIME and space are big words. Spelled with a capital letter, and used in certain connections known to the metaphysicians, they are indeed a little awesome. 'Tis only when we reflect that after they have wreaked their fullest might upon the imagination, there rises in us a stubborn rebel, who owes them no allegiance, that the dazed mind recovers its self-possession.

In this high sense, we may say that Anne Gould in her little box of a cottage was the same woman, owning the same moral qualities, the same intellectual force and physical presence, as she who presided over the stately mansion.

But this, if the truth, is only part of it. In a humbler sense she was a very different woman. She had not relied, perhaps, unduly upon her own ability to meet and grapple with this emergency; but she had plainly under-estimated the cost of the struggle to herself.

She found, perhaps, as others have found, that the excitement of resolve is a nerving power which dwarfs obstacles until they are overcome; that it is only in retrospect they loom up in their true proportions.

She could now, for the first time, review the situation, and see where the whirl of things in the past few months had left her ; see that she had left a mountain-top with little chance of "battening on a moor."

She found, too, no doubt, that the aspect of things varies greatly with the point of view ; that from the picturesque to the prosaic is but a step ; that the romance of sacrifice belongs to the moment of anticipation, and leaves the after-time of fulfilment too often dreary and humdrum.

She found, at any rate, ample opportunity to realize how largely ambition had been a motive principle in her life, as she stood among its wrecks and counted her loss. She might well ask what was left. She doubtless did ask it, but she wasted no time in idly repeating the question. She addressed herself to its solution. She mustered the remnants of her hope, and maintained an undaunted front to her son, not by any affectation of indifference, but by persistently taking the situation at its best. No despondent word or look ever escaped her in his presence : nay, more, she was unflinching, resolutely cheerful.

It was the daily whitening of her hair, the deepening lines of her face, that told the story of Mrs. Gould's struggle, and revealed the cost of the victory.

But Noll was unconscious enough of all this. He took no note of such little points. His mother, to him, was like the sky, subject to trivial changes of aspect from day to day, but essentially the same, — steadfast and abiding. Moreover he had, doubtless, something of the inconsiderateness, if not selfishness, of the spoiled son, which was rather a habit than a fault. He did not regard his mother as an object of solicitude, because she had never presented herself to him as such ; had never claimed, but always proffered, sympathy, — had always held out a supporting rather than a suppliant hand.

Indeed, Noll took no critical notice of home affairs.

Supposing his mother to be content with her own arrangements, he asked no questions, and made no comments. He blundered uncomplainingly down the narrow passages of his new home, bumping his head and knocking his shins ; for at first there seemed nowhere any spare room in which to stretch out his long legs.

In all these moves and changes Mrs. Gould had taken no thought of Naomi, save to keep from her, so far as possible, all knowledge of the true state of affairs. Accustomed to account to her family for only such of her own actions as she saw fit, they were never surprised at her want of confidence, and Naomi doubtless found nothing unusual in it. But great events have an atmosphere of their own : the air about them is dense with something of their savor and essence. Silence was ineffectual concealment. Naomi's intuition, moreover, was of barometric delicacy. The facts could not long escape her. It was in their interpretation, if at all, that she went astray. And indeed the cross-scents were perplexing. For instance, one day she came in to Mrs. Gould with her bonnet and cloak on, saying, —

"Cousin Anne, can I have the carriage this morning to go to the village?"

"I have sold the horses, my dear : I will go down to the village with you ; we shall both be better for the walk."

The obvious inferences to be drawn from this were somewhat invalidated by the arrival of her old expensive music-teacher, the next day, to begin a new quarter's lessons, and the gift of a handsome silk dress the next time cousin Anne returned from town.

Again, she went up to Noll with a little parcel, one morning, as he was about setting off for the city, and said, —

"Cousin Noll, will you please take this to Helen the next time you go there? It is one of her pocket-handkerchiefs."

"You had better send it by mail," was Noll's faltering reply.

"Here, here, my dear: I will take care of it," cried his mother, coming bustling up, and taking it from her hand.

It needed not here the blind girl's keenness of sense to detect the disturbance in the tones of mother and son.

There were other things, that needed not be told, too, that could not be concealed. The struggle made by the mother to maintain a steady cheerfulness before her son was, necessarily, at the cost of some bitter moments to herself. These moods of silence and depression, as well as a growing irritation and impatience under the petty trials of housewifery, told their own story. Nor were other signs wanting, — the loss of the old-time vigor of step, the hearty ring of voice, and the fast-thinning locks of the once abundant hair, — to show that all was not well with the mistress of the house.

Meantime, if Mrs. Gould imagined that Naomi was unconscious of, or indifferent to, what had taken place, or was content to remain in ignorance, she was destined to be speedily undeceived.

One day, after some fretful exclamation, followed by an unconscious sigh, from Mrs. Gould, Naomi turned suddenly upon her, and exclaimed, —

"What's the matter with you, cousin Anne?"

"Matter? Why — nothing," she stammered, rousing herself.

"There is!" returned Naomi boldly.

"Really!" exclaimed Mrs. Gould in astonishment.

"And there has been for a good while."

"Pooh, pooh! there's always something the matter with everybody: it's nothing killing."

"Why don't you answer me?"

Mrs. Gould looked at her charge in surprise. The latter was standing with her eyes shut, as usual when

excited, her cheeks flushed, and her small hand extended as if to catch and gather in the impressions her eyes could not give.

"Do you think I shall be satisfied with that explanation?" she continued.

"I do not know that I am bound to satisfy your curiosity about my private affairs," returned Mrs. Gould a little coldly.

"You are. It isn't curiosity, you know it isn't. Shame upon you! you shall not speak to me so."

"Mercy upon us! Why, what's come over you, child?"

"I have a right to know what I ask."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Gould, with big eyes.

"I am no longer a child, and you shall not evade me. You are in trouble."

"I am in no trouble that you can help me out of," said Mrs. Gould more gently.

"You do not know; you cannot tell; you have no right to assume it. You came to me when I was in trouble, and brought me aid and sympathy: I accepted both gratefully. Who are you, that you should reject the like from me? Must I always and forever bear the curse of that almshouse hanging over my head?"

"Naomi, Naomi, silence!"

"I can not, I will not! Why do you hold me off at such a distance? I owe every thing to you. O cousin!" she exclaimed, coming nearer and taking her kinswoman's hand, "do you think I can ever forget it, or that I ever hope to be able to repay you? Is it not, then, a small thing, when you are in trouble, to let me share it,—to let me try, at least, to lighten your load?"

"My dear child, I do not count as any thing but a pleasure the service I was able to render you. If you want to aid and comfort me, you can best do it by never referring to that subject again."

"I must refer to it, so long as it remains an obliga-

tion ; and it can never cease to be an obligation, while you refuse to accept my good offices."

"Naomi, my dear, once for all let us understand each other. I continually accept your good offices. Your presence in my house is a pleasure and a comfort to me. I am sure of your good-will and sympathy, and that is enough. Protestation is unnecessary, and I do not overmuch value it."

"Sympathy ! What is my sympathy worth, when I am ignorant of every thing that is going on around me ? I might as well be a stone image. Oh ! it is cruel to keep things from me so : it is taking advantage of my infirmity. But," she continued proudly, "I am not all blind. I can see without eyes. Cousin, you have had some great trouble : you have lost your fortune ?"

"Yes."

"You are poor now ?"

"Yes."

"And you did not tell me. You let me stay here a burden upon you, living in luxury that you cannot afford. It is wrong, it is cruel. You treat me like a child, as though I were incapable of any effort or any sacrifice. You will find that you are mistaken," exclaimed the blind girl, turning to leave the room with a look as proud as Mrs. Gould's own.

"Naomi !"

She stopped, and turned with her hand upon the latch : that firm, authoritative tone exercised at all times a magical influence upon her.

"It would be a sufficient reason for not confiding in you, that you are so impulsive and violent. There is no occasion for your present excitement. Things are not so bad with me as you think. You need have no fear. I shall never do any thing that I cannot afford ; and, when the time comes that you are a burden upon me, I will very frankly tell you so."

The cold tone in which this was said was, perhaps,

best adapted to allay Naomi's heroic mood ; but at the same time it aroused a little her indignation.

"I may not choose to wait for that time," she said shortly.

"As for the rest," continued Mrs. Gould, disregarding this retort, "it would not make me more happy to see you wretched. I have thus far been able to bear whatever trouble has been allotted me in life without murmur. I trust I may never live to disgrace myself, or weary my friends, by bemoaning what cannot be helped. Whatever despondency I may have felt latterly, has been more on Noll's account than my own."

"You have more reason to think of yourself. Cousin Noll is a man, and he is young. He earns his living now ; he will earn more by and by ; and Helen has a fortune of her own."

"Miss Houghton's fortune is nothing to my son."

"What?" cried Naomi, more startled at the tone than the words.

"I mean," answered Mrs. Gould haughtily, "that you need never associate Noll's name with Miss Houghton's again."

"Why, has he—have they— Oh, poor, poor Noll!" cried Naomi, bursting into a flood of tears as the truth flashed upon her.

1

CHAPTER II.

AN UNEXPECTED VISIT.

THE large hall of Cooper Institute was filled with an attentive audience. A glance sufficed to show its unusual character: it was composed almost entirely of women. The presence of a few men of a mild and inoffensive appearance added variety rather than dignity to the occasion.

The meeting had been organized: the opening oration had been made. A murmur of conversation and criticism followed. A large woman in black was going about, conferring with the twenty or more ladies upon the platform. Suddenly she came forward; the conversation stopped; she tapped with her mallet upon the table, and said, —

"I take great pleasure in presenting to you, as the next speaker, our eloquent friend, Mrs. Stephen Badger."

There was a round of applause as Mrs. Badger appeared. She removed her gloves, loosened her bonnet-strings, settled her spectacles well up on the bridge of her nose, and began, —

"Ladies, women, sisters — I wish I might add fellow-citizens! But I can't. A woman in this country ain't good enough for a citizen yet. She takes a liberty in considerin' herself a human bein'. The law don't recognize her as such. The law puts her somewhere between a human bein' and a thing — and gen'rally a good deal nearer the thing! (*Applause.*) Now, who's responsible for this? I'll tell yer: it's your husbands and fathers and brothers, — the men that sit in your parlors, and eat at your tables; they're the

ones! It's their doin's that we ain't considered so good as the ignorant, degraded foreigners that make our brick and dig our dirt. An' whose fault is it? It's your own. How long is it goin' to last? Jest as long as you choose to put up with it, but"—

Here Mrs. Badger paused, drew herself to her full height, and struck the table with a resounding thump.

—"Not a single day longer!" (*Loud and prolonged applause.*) "An' what I want to say to you to-day is, that you've put up with it long enough, that 'tis time the women of America claimed their rights. We are slaves to-day!" (*Applause.*) "We wear chains, every one of us; and we always shall till we do something to git red of 'em. But what shall we do? Look at history! What does it teach? It teaches us that slaves never yet got their freedom, till they won it for themselves, till they fought for it. Man is a natural tyrant. He was born so: he has never been taught any better. Now, it's your business to teach him. Do you expect to set still, and wait till he comes an' offers you your rights? He will never do it. You will remain in bondage till the crack of doom, unless you rise and shake it off. They tell us the time hain't come yet for women to have their rights. I tell you, women of America, the time never will come till you bring it. I tell you, the time *has* come. I tell you," continued Mrs. Badger, elevating her voice, and extending her forefinger with climactic impressiveness,—"I tell you, I say, that this very day, an' this very hour, is the time to strike the blow."

At this moment a person in black, with a pale face and a prominent nose, who had just entered, and seated herself directly in front of the platform, rose in evident excitement, as if to address the speaker. The speaker continued, oblivious of the person,—

"They tell us, woman can't understand public affairs. Why can't she? She's got as much common-sense, I take it, as the run of men: if she hain't I pity

her. (*Laughter.*) They say she ain't the equal of man. Why ain't she? If I didn't know my own mind, and couldn't go to the polls, and vote for the principles I believe in, as well as any man in the country, I'd " — Mrs. Badger paused for a simile — "*I'd go and bury myself!*"

The unexpected strength of this conclusion drew from the house a burst of applause. The person with the prominent nose rose again, and, advancing a step up the aisle, addressed the speaker, but in a voice so weak as to be inaudible. The speaker continued in stentorian tones. With her head thrown back, her bonnet-strings floating over her shoulders, and her gleaming spectacles levelled full at the admiring audience, she was fast warming up to her subject, when again the persistent person in black essayed to speak. The chairwoman at length perceiving her, came to the edge of the platform, and said, —

"The lady will please not interrupt the speaker. If she disagrees with any thing that has been said, she will have an opportunity to reply at the close of the speech."

The person in black paid not the slightest heed to this injunction, but still endeavored to attract the speaker's attention. The chairwoman again interposed with some emphasis, —

"I must request the lady to be seated."

The stranger, with her eyes fixed intently upon the speaker, advanced slowly up the aisle, while the latter, with attention and spectacles riveted upon the audience, talked on over her head.

"I tell you that a woman is not only a man's equal, she is his superior. She can talk better, she can write better, an', if she's any sort of a woman, she can get the best of him in an argument." (*Laughter and applause.*) "Give her a fair chance, and she will always hold her own. I've defended *my* life and property for fifty years, an' I've got a good strong hold of both yet."

The undismayed stranger in black was now close to the platform, looking up into the speaker's face. The chairwoman, with indignant looks, confronted her with : —

"If the person does not regard the order of the chair, and abstain from interruption, the chair must order her removal from the room."

"An' I mean to keep it !" concluded Mrs. Badger, thumping the desk.

"Mother !"

Mrs. Badger started, and looked down upon the figure before her.

"Why, V'lumny !"

"Come home."

"Eh ?"

"Come home right away."

"What's the matter ?"

"They've 'tached the dēpôt."

"Good gra-cious !" ejaculated Mrs. Badger, swallowing the last syllable, with a sudden remembrance of her position.

Presently recollecting herself, she turned to the audience, said a few words in explanation, and, retiring from the platform, left the hall with her daughter.

"Who did it, V'lumny ?" she asked breathlessly, as soon as they were upon the street.

"Ferrette, of course."

"What's he done ?"

"Put a man in the house to keep hold of every thing, an' see't we don't carry it off."

"Why, that'll stop the business."

"Yes."

"What you goin' to do ?"

"Well, I shall git him out 'f I can."

"You wait till I git home, V'lumny. I guess he won't enjoy stayin' there a great while."

"Twon't do no good," said Miss Badger, shaking her head.

"What you goin' to do, then?"

"Give bonds."

"You ben to see the lawyer?"

"Yes."

"Can you git him out to-day?"

"I guess so."

"What d'he put him in for, then, 'f you can git him out so quick?"

"Guess he thought I couldn't git bondsmen."

"Well, I don't believe you can."

"I shall try."

"How much is it?"

"He has sued for eighty thousand dollars."

"Eighty thousand fiddlesticks! The dēpôt ain't worth the first figger of it."

"He has 'tached the property too."

"What, the Damen prop'ty?"

"Yes."

"Where are you goin' to git bondsmen for all that?"

"I shall go to some of our rich customers."

"They won't do it."

"I s'pose I shall have to give 'em security."

"Well, this is a pretty muddle. What did the lawyer say?"

"He said, to dissolve the attachment, and demand a bill of particulars."

"What's that?"

"I don't know exactly: some kind of an account, I b'lieve, givin' the items."

"What then?"

"He says Ferrette'll never dare to take it to court."

"What d'he sue for, then?"

"To scare us, I s'pose."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Mrs. Badger contemptuously, as they turned into Pike's Court, "an' what'll be the upshot of it?"

"I don't know: s'pose he'll try and settle."

"That man's a villain, deep dyed. Look out for him, V'lumny!"

By this time they had reached the door of the dépôt. Miss Badger stopped on the threshold, and drew a key from her pocket.

"What's that?" asked her mother.

"It's the key of the shop: I locked it 'fore I started. I don't want that man pokin' round here, nosin' out the secret of the 'Onnheton: ' you must stay an' keep a watch on him. P'r'aps he's burst the door open 'fore this: you'd better go an' set there, I guess."

"Don't you fret about that: I'll take care of him, V'lumny. He won't do much pokin' round in any room where I am, I reckon; an' I shall be round the house pretty gen'rally while he stays. Where be you goin'?"

"Goin' to hunt up them bondsmen, an' then see the lawyer."

In fact, Miss Badger, in some way known only to herself, succeeded in getting sureties on her bond, and had the attachment duly dissolved before night. She came home looking even more white and dragged than usual, with an order to the keeper to leave the house. Mrs. Badger stood at the head of the stairs, and gave that worthy a parting injunction, to be remembered by him to the end of his days.

Mr. Ferrette had, by statute, a limited time in which to render the itemized account demanded as the "bill of particulars." One morning, before that time had elapsed, Miss Badger received a note from him, requesting her to come to his office on particular business. She read it two or three times over, and silently handed it to her mother. Mrs. Badger wiped her spectacles, and read the note slowly and carefully.

"What's he want?" she asked, laying it down.

"I don't know."

"Don't you go near him, V'lumny."

"I didn't think of it," returned Miss Badger quietly.

"You goin' to answer it?"

"I guess not."

The third day after the receipt of the note the office-boy came up, towards the close of the afternoon, to say that there was a gentleman below who wanted to see Miss Badger.

"Tell him to walk up here," said her mother.

In a minute more the door opened, and Mr. Ferrette, with his widest smile, walked into the room.

Mrs. Badger, quite petrified with astonishment, sat upon the edge of her chair, and levelled her spectacles at him in silence. Miss Badger was darning a stocking, and continued her work without a minute's pause, or the exhibition of the least emotion.

"I suppose you are surprised to see me."

"Yes, we are; an' not very agreeably surprised either," said Mrs. Badger, recovering herself.

"Mother!"

"V'lumny," retorted Mrs. Badger indignantly, "if you think I am goin' to be mealy-mouthed to this man, you're mistaken. I didn't go runnin' after him; but, if he comes to my house, he needn't think I will mince matters."

"I extremely regret," returned Mr. Ferrette, very much taken aback by Mrs. Badger's uncompromising look and tone, "the little unpleasantness there has been between us. I think it all grew out of a mistake; and if you had not been so hasty, if we had only thoroughly understood each other, every thing would have gone quite smoothly."

"Bah!" exclaimed Mrs. Badger.

"At any rate," — he went on, trying to ignore the elder lady and nervously glancing at the younger, — "I hope you won't let any foolish prejudice interfere with our future relations. It is very necessary for all our interests that we should put personal feelings out of the question."

Miss Badger broke a piece of thread from a ball, wet the end of it in her mouth, rolled it between her thumb and forefinger, passed it through the eye of her needle, and went deliberately on with her work, without once glancing at her visitor. He, with his watchful eyes fixed upon her, took a chair, and put down his hat upon the floor, thus bringing his hands into play.

"Look here, young man," said Mrs. Badger, rising and advancing to the middle of the room, "before you go on with any more palaver, I want to tell you that it's all wasted on us. We've found you out. You're a villain: that's what you are. I wouldn't hold any more terms with you than I would with a wild beast or a reptile; and my daughter sha'n't, if I can help it. You come here and set down in my house without bein' asked. If I was a man, I'd throw you through the winder."

"Ha, ha!" cried Mr. Ferrette, trying to laugh. "I am obliged to you for your very kind opinion. I should not have presumed to come to see *you*: I came to see your daughter."

"I don't care who you came to see."

"Mother!"

"V'lumny," cried Mrs. Badger, pointing her long forefinger full at Ferrette, who visibly quailed before her, "that man is a scoundrel, an' you know it; an' I warn you to have nothin' to do with him."

"Miss Badger," said the lawyer nervously, "I came here on an important matter of business, to see *you*."

"Oh!"

"But, if you are so excited, it will not be worth while to say any thing about it."

"I don't know," returned Miss Badger, weaving her needle carefully in and out, and speaking in her thinnest, flattest drawl, "that I am pertick'larly excited."

"Well, your mother is; and so very violent that" —

"Mother has a right to her opinion, I s'pose; but I don't know's I'm responsible for what she says."

"Not at all, not at all; and I'm glad to see you are not so — so prejudiced. — I beg your pardon, madam."

"Don't waste your civility on me," exclaimed Mrs. Badger with a gesture of aversion.

"I came in, Miss Badger, to talk over our little matter with you. It would be a great relief to have the whole thing settled up."

"I s'pose so."

"And it would be a great saving of time and expense to both of us not to go to court with it."

"Would it? Oh!"

"Certainly. The trial would be a long and expensive one. It would have to be sent to an auditor, and then come back to court; and, although there is not the slightest doubt that I should win the case eventually, I would, for the sake of gaining time, settle it for a less amount."

In and out, in and out, went Miss Badger's needle; but Miss Badger's eyes were rooted to her work, and Miss Badger did not speak.

"Of course you will not pretend to deny that you owe me the money."

"*The money?*" repeated Miss Badger.

"Yes: that you owe me money, the amount of which, if you please, is in dispute."

"I don't deny, an' I don't admit: I don't say any thing about it," said Miss Badger.

"Whether you say any thing or not, you know very well that you haven't paid me; that you are keeping me out of money I have honestly earned."

"Folks don't generally pay money till they git a bill."

"A bill!" echoed Mr. Ferrette with a little frown.

"Yes," said Miss Badger, biting off her thread, smoothing out her stocking, and laying it upon a pile before her.

"Well — I — ha — it wasn't convenient at the time :

it was a long job, and nobody could do it but myself."

"Oh!"

"But that's neither here nor there. I earned the money. You owe it to me now. The question is, will you pay it?"

"Mother'n' I are generally ready to pay any thing that we owe."

"Yes; but we ain't ready to be swindled, an' we don't propose to be!" exclaimed Mrs. Badger, who had resumed her seat, or rather perched herself so far upon the extreme edge of her chair that she was in momentary danger of tipping over, as she sat in wrapt attention to what was going on.

"Very well, then," continued Mr. Ferrette, still ignoring the latter lady: "it will be an easy matter to arrange the amount."

"I s'pose so."

"In the first place let me remind you of our original bargain, the first time you came to see me."

"Well?"

"You know I was extremely reluctant to take the case at all."

"Why, I don't exactly remember that."

"I told you it wasn't professional."

"You've told me that about a good many things since. I guess I don't know what it means."

Mr. Ferrette scowled, and cast an ugly glance at the impassive face of the speaker.

"I didn't want to undertake it," he went on: "you know it very well. I only did it because you were so poor; because I wanted to see you get your rights. You said if I failed I should get nothing."

Miss Badger thrust her hand into the leg of a fresh stocking, and examined the foot critically without speaking.

"But, if I succeeded, of course I was to get a larger amount than usual, for taking the risk. You made the

proposition yourself, and I reluctantly acceded to it."

"Fudge!" ejaculated Mrs. Badger.

"Now, of course, you know the usual way of dividing the proceeds in such cases?"

"I guess I don't."

"Why," continued Mr. Ferrette, anxiously studying the effect of his words, "the attorney and the client usually go halves."

"Oh!"

"If I had stipulated for this in the beginning, you would have made no objection: you could have done nothing else. But I trusted to your honor."

Miss Badger darned on in silence. Mr. Ferrette hesitated, and pulled his long moustache.

"But," continued Mr. Ferrette, taking on suddenly an off-hand manner, "don't mistake me; don't suppose I come here to dicker. I come to make you a proposition. I have made up my mind, for the sake of a speedy settlement, to make, once for all, a large deduction in my claim. But I shall carry it no further, mind you; and I will not keep the offer open. Now, Miss Badger if you will meet me in the same spirit, the thing is done. I will take off twenty-five per cent of my claim."

"Mother'n' I ain't very quick at doin' sums in our head."

"Well, in round numbers that would leave — er — say fifty thousand dollars."

"Oh!" said Miss Badger.

"Fifty thousand fiddlesticks!" exclaimed her mother.

"What do you say to that?" asked Mr. Ferrette at length, after waiting several minutes for an answer.

"Why," said Miss Badger slowly, as she deliberately knotted a long thread, "I — guess — we — won't — do — it."

Mr. Ferrette's scalp rolled forward, and settled over

his eyes in the old way, and he sat for a long time in silence, scowling at the floor.

"What *will* you do?" he asked at length sullenly.

"Well," returned Miss Badger in her flattest tone, and most unimpressive way, "I s'pose we might as well let it go on."

"What, take it to court?"

"Ye-es."

It would be hard to imagine the look of pure malignity that Mr. Ferrette shot at the pale, quiet woman before him, so peacefully occupied, and moderately speaking.

"Why didn't you tell him so in the first place, V'lunny? — *I* told you," exclaimed Mrs. Badger, turning to the discomfited attorney, "that we wouldn't hold any terms with you, an' we hain't."

A sudden gleam of wrath shone in the little lawyer's eyes, and he sprang to his feet as if about to retort; but he suddenly checked himself, and advancing towards Miss Badger with a smile, said insinuatingly, —

"Perhaps you'd better take time to think of this. You may not have considered that it will cost you more to carry on a second lawsuit than it will to settle up the first."

Whether this was designed as a menace or not, it evidently struck Miss Badger in some especial way, for she almost started, and made a movement as if to speak; but Mr. Ferrette, with distended moustache, and an elaborate bow, was already vanishing through the door.

CHAPTER III.

CORYDON.

THAT is a pretty and specious bit of solace about the darkest hour before the dawn. But who shall say when the dawn begins?

It is a theory of artists, that pure black has no place in a picture; that, as there can be no picture without light, when once that subtle, penetrating element is admitted, it straightway modifies, and really — if imperceptibly — raises the tone of the farthest and densest outlying shadow.

Mrs. Gould's case sufficiently illustrates this. In the depth of her despondency, there suddenly flashed forth a ray of light which speedily illumined the whole situation.

Of course it had to do with her son: his tall figure stood in the near foreground of her every view of the future.

An angel of mercy — Toil — came with the needed nepenthe. He grasped the proffered cup. In his grief he turned characteristically to the nearest distraction, and that was his business. To this he now gave himself with a vigor never before shown. But it was far enough from being the vigor of hope and cheer: it was a hard, fierce, resolved vigor, in which he sought by mind's work and body's work to down with the "climbing sorrow" within.

His mother saw this clearly enough and evidently with satisfaction. It was the mark of manhood she had looked for in her son, and not in vain. It was the ring of the true steel in him. What mattered it that he came home every night, almost spent with fatigue, and fell asleep in his chair after dinner?

What mattered it that he grew pale and thin? She showed no anxiety. She knew his constitution, and the strain it would bear. Far from betraying any weak alarm, she urged him on; concerned herself in his business, asked a thousand questions, mastered its details, and kept herself posted as to its daily transactions; and when, at the end of the year, he had an unlooked for promotion, she forgot all past trouble in her present exceeding joy.

Moreover, Mrs. Gould had had experience of the world. She knew something of the healing efficacy of time; knew something of that marvellous organ in the human thorax,—the so-called seat of the affections,—and of its immense recuperative power; knew that it survives grievous usage, and beats on its regular, so-many pulsations to the minute, long after it has been figuratively crushed. Perhaps, too, she had seen enough of life to know that when fickle Thyrasis proves false, and the world looks very black to Corydon, he will nevertheless go on dumbly, patiently feeding his sheep, and presently discover that the sunshine is still golden, the grass still green, the flowers and birds still fragrant and tuneful, and every thing much as it was, for all perfidious Thyrasis. Alas for fair dreams and sweet ravings of the poets! Alas for vows of eternal fidelity pledged beneath the inconstant moon! Corydon's sleep is sound; his appetite returns; and he goes his way, with only the wings of his hope a little clipped, and a certain something of freshness and zest gone out of life never to return.

So, too, with Oliver: as the months passed by, Mrs. Gould evidently found reason to abate her anxiety with regard to him. He ate well, he slept well; he grumbled at his food in the old-time fashion; he began to read evenings, instead of going to sleep; to romp with his dog, and to tease his cousin. This was an old, inveterate habit of his boyhood; and, much as she discountenanced it, Mrs. Gould now hailed it as a

sign that he was getting into a more healthful state of mind. Naomi certainly was a tempting victim: her sharp retorts, irascibility, and defiant moods afforded Noll infinite delight; the rather, that, beyond the passing irritation of the moment, she cherished no ill-will, and they were none the worse friends.

The first time Noll had been heard to laugh for months was during one of these little passages at arms with his cousin; and, when the unaccustomed sound came floating in to his mother in the next room, it was like the strain of some old, loved, half-forgotten melody. It had a ring of the earlier time, of those happier days before the disastrous lawsuit, and that other more disastrous suit that was lost with it. And so Anne Gould heaved a deep sigh, and relaxed for a moment her grave lips as she paused in her reading to listen to the controversy.

"I shall do no such thing," said Naomi tartly.

"You should not be so positive: you may change your mind. Come, now, let us reason."

"I do not wish to reason."

"I know the feminine mind is rather averse to logic, but I'll consider all that: I'll adapt my arguments to your understanding."

"I wish you would stop talking to me."

"That isn't polite."

"I'm not obliged to be polite."

"To be sure you are: *noblesse oblige*."

"That has nothing to do with politeness."

"Excuse me: it means, you should do honor to your sex and breeding; and you can't do that without being polite."

"Yes, I can."

"How?"

"By resenting impertinencies."

"Fie! that is savage: aren't you ashamed to talk so to your dear cousin? Come here now, and beg my pardon."

"If you don't stop talking to me directly, I shall leave the room."

"Oh, very well! I will stop, of course. So please understand that all further remarks I may make are addressed to my respectable great-grandmother hanging there on the wall. — Now, my dear grandmamma," he continued, whimsically consulting the portrait, "you are a person of experience: what say you? Is it not the duty of a young woman to be always polite when a young person of the opposite sex condescends to talk to her? And furthermore, do you consider it in any way polite for the said young woman to dispute statements made by people older and wiser than herself, and do it, moreover, in a tone not calculated to encourage further sociability?"

At this point Naomi arose without a word, and walked quickly towards the door.

"How now? Here! stop! You unconscionable little tyrant! Am I not to be allowed to talk with my own great-grandmother?"

"You can talk with whom you like."

"Oh! well, go, of course, if you persist. If you had not been in such a hurry, though," he continued, affecting to stifle a yawn, "I was about to say I had a letter for you."

This was very dexterous. Naomi stopped upon the threshold. In the whole round of minor social pleasures, nothing so much delighted her as a letter. As she had few correspondents, they were proportionably dear to her.

"Have you really a letter for me?" she asked with severe dignity.

"Really."

"Please to give it to me, then, directly."

"Excuse me: I cannot conveniently get it now."

"Why?"

"I'm too tired."

"I will get it myself, then."

"Very well."

"Where is it?"

"In my pocket."

With an expression of pure exasperation, she made a move to leave the room; then pausing, as if with a sudden thought that she was retiring defeated, she turned back and asked, —

"Which pocket?"

"The inside breast-pocket."

Forcing herself to the repugnant task, she walked directly to her cousin's chair, found his pocket in a moment, drew forth several papers, and, quickly selecting the only unopened envelope, replaced the others as she had found them.

He looked on with an air of quiet but intense amusement, and, just as she was about to go, threw his arms about her, and held her fast.

"Be kind enough to let me go," she said, with an indescribable air of lofty dignity and labored patience.

"Will you shake hands?"

"No."

"Beg my pardon, then, for being so cross."

"I will not."

"Then, you're a prisoner."

"Let me go at once!"

"Tell me first, are we friends?"

"Friends enough."

"What's 'enough' mean?"

"It means that you are not worth considering, either as a friend or an enemy," she exclaimed, with a little outburst of wrath, as she broke from him and escaped with her letter.

"Oh, ho!" cried Noll, laughing with delight, as he made a futile attempt to recover the agile fugitive.

Soon after the talk above recorded with Mrs. Gould, Naomi had begun, for the first time, to take a part in household affairs, where, by intelligence and deftness,

she soon acquired a dexterity which no little astonished her cousin, who was accordingly betrayed into involuntary expressions of praise, that fell like precious balm upon the ears of the recipient. Gradually enlarging the sphere of her duties, and doing every thing with the nicety and thoroughness so dear to the exacting mistress of the house, she soon became a most active and efficient helper.

The effect of all this upon her as an individual was notable. It was not unlike the opening of a chrysalis, — an entrance upon a new and broader life. Faculties hitherto unused quickly unfolded and developed. The widened field of duty, of interest and sympathy, brought with it a new sense of personal value, a consciousness of being a necessary part of the life about her, which had a natural effect upon her health, spirits, and even looks.

And so it chanced, as her cheeks became fuller, her eyes brighter, her step more elastic, she lost something of her old petulance and cold constraint. And so it chanced that Mrs. Gould, noting these happy changes in the rest of her household, duly wondered and rejoiced, and put away her own anxiety. And so it chanced that these three hearts, shrouded for a time in darkness, turned at length towards the light, and found it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GHOST WILL NOT DOWN.

JOE PIVERTON and Buster rode home in the solitary carriage that had followed poor Liz to the distant corner of Greenwood, where they had laid her to rest. Something had prompted Joe to borrow the child at the last moment. "I'm sure Liz wouldn't object now," he muttered to himself, as he stood before Mrs. Flannigan's door: "and 'twill be better than going alone; I don't feel that I could quite stand it all alone."

"Is it the baby? Deed that ye can. — Coome here, now, till I make ye dacent the way ye can go wid Misther Pivleton," exclaimed warm-hearted Mrs. Flannigan, seizing the young hopeful from the floor. "Oh, Misther Pivleton, oh, sir! but I'm sorry for yez. I'm afther cryin' all night, so I am; but the Lord tuk her, sir; she'll git pace now, poor thing, so she will, afther sufferin' so long wid the pain — stand still, ye spalpeen, while I clane yer face — shure 'tis better so, ye know it yersel'; ye'll not be for wishin' her back, Misther Pivleton. But she was greatly wasted away, wasn't she, now, wid the sickness, poor darlint? but she wint aisy at lasht, Lord rest her sowl. — An' what'll I do for shoes for ye, honey, at all, at all? Sorra a stitch av a shoe have ye got in the wurld. — Ye see, sir, I lave him run bare-futted, the way he'd kape healthy-like, an' that's the rayson av it; an' it's a disgrace to me, so it is. — Ah, the poor sither! it's only this mornin', whin ye wor out, I wint up to see her. It's an iligant coffun ye have, Misther Pivleton. — Coome here, Jamie, an' lind me yer shoes for yer brother," she cried, catching up the next older, and taking off

a pair of rather dilapidated slippers. "They're a bit large, ye see, sir; but I'll tie 'em up wid a string. — An' doesn't she look like an angel itself, lyin' there above, so peaceful, wid the posies in her hand? But, shure, ye won't be lamentin', sir: it's what's comin' to us all, won day — glory to God! — There he is now, the darlint. Ye'd want to give him a bit of an owld crust, or a taste o' apple, or the like o' that, in his hand the way he'd kape quite, ye know. — Good-by, sir: the Lord's blessin' be an yez, Misther Pivleton. I'll have a bit o' supper for ye agin ye come back."

And so she did. The poor little rooms were opened and aired, the bed taken away, a fire kindled, and a nice supper laid out by Mrs. Flannigan and the cobbler's wife. Joe was quite touched at their kindness, and tried to make them sit down and share the meal with him. When they would not be prevailed upon, he begged the further privilege of Buster's company, and brought forth the starch-box, which had done service for a succession of "Busters." For, let it not be supposed that this was the original "Buster." That child had long ago become what Joe called a "young Flannigan," — a ragged, dirty, curly-pated, freckled, roaring boy of six. Subsequent "Busters" were, in different stages, approaching the same goal; while Joe's present favorite — the latest — was a fac-simile of what the first had been five years ago.

And so Joe and Buster ate their supper; and after supper Joe carried his little guest home, fast asleep on his shoulder; and presently the cheery old cobbler came up to smoke with Joe over the fire; and, later on, Joe turned into his little den to bed, where, in the night, came a vision of Liz as she looked when a girl, long, long ago; no more sick and wan, but bright and peaceful and smiling. And Joe recalled the dream in the morning, and the last pang faded from his heart before the conviction that all had surely happened for the best.

But another question now stared him in the face,— a very old, a very new, a very pressing, a very vulgar question ; a question that comes to the genius and the fool, to the young and to the old, to Robinson Crusoe upon his desert island, and Dr. Johnson wandering the streets of London ; a question as enduring as life and as merciless as death,— the question of bread-and-butter.

Out of work, involved in debt, with no one to help or recommend him, the prospect looked a very little blank to Joe this same bright morning ; the world seemed somewhat noisy and dreary, and life a very little hollow and empty, like that room yonder tenanted now only by an echo. But Joe's hope, be it said, had never had very much level road to travel : it had found life pretty much all an alpine way, with store of mists and fogs and avalanches, and so it had grown used to climbing ; used, too, to short commons, it subsisted for days picking the lean bones of past blessings, and grew quite fat upon a meagre scattering of new crumbs. And so Joe was very far from yielding to these little fleeting impressions we have mentioned. Eating his breakfast,— the remains of last night's feast,— he borrowed the baby for an hour, and talked the matter over with him. Buster argued the question with such a flow of inarticulate eloquence, and such an energetic flourish of clenched fists, as to convince Joe there was no need for despair or doubt in the case. Whereupon he brushed his coat, and presently set forth to try his chances.

In casting about where to go first, Joe bethought him, oddly enough, of Judge Clark, their old antagonist in "*Badger agst. Gould.*" He had seen much of that gentleman in the long progress of the case, had been to his office on numerous errands, and learned to like and respect his blunt kindliness, straightforward dealing, and honorable regard for his word. Joe had at first some qualms about going : the judge might

well regard with suspicion any one coming from Ferrette's employment ; but on further thought he resolved to make the attempt, and in the course of the morning presented himself at the judge's office. He sat some time in the ante-room, and was finally admitted. The judge looked up with a sharp, inquiring look, and cried, —

"What now ! Badger and Gould again ?"

"No, sir : I'm done with that, I hope," answered Joe, stepping a little nearer, and twirling his hat in his hand. "'Twas something else I wanted to speak to you about."

"Well, talk away, my friend !" exclaimed the judge, looking at his watch impatiently. "I'm pressed for time this morning."

"I came to see if you would give me some work."

"Eh ? What ? left that rascal Ferrette ?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's the matter ?"

"Why," began Joe hesitating, "we had a little difficulty."

"Eh ? Possible ? Difficulty with that good man ? I'm amazed. You must be a very bad sort of fellow. And you want to come here, do you ? I've work enough, but," continued the keen old lawyer, whirling around, and giving Joe a searching look, "I don't know about you : how can I tell you're not a spy ?"

"You'll have to take me on trust, sir, I'm afraid : Ferrette wouldn't recommend me."

"The best recommendation from him would be a curse."

"He'd give me that fast enough now."

"How did you ever come to be with him ? Didn't you know he was a knave ?"

"I found it out after a while."

"Why didn't you leave him then ?"

"He owed me money."

"Did he pay you?"

"He gave me his note."

"His note! Ho, ho! Did you find anybody to discount it?"

"It wasn't negotiable."

"The rascal! Burn it up, throw it away, charge it to profit and loss: it's no good! Now, look here, young man, — Piverton, is it? — I have no time to talk this morning. You look honest. I like your face. I can give you work. You may come and try for a while. If you deal fairly with me, you will be well treated; but, if you serve me any Ferrette tricks, I'll make you smart for it, and no quarter. Do we understand each other? Very well, then: when I see what you can do, we'll settle about the wages. Come when you like. My managing man will give you a desk, and set you to work. Good-morning."

Joe went to work as he was bid, — went with a grateful heart; and the future looked brighter than he had ever remembered it, that first morning when he tucked his legs under an old, battered, ink-stained, mahogany desk in the judge's office. And Joe felt more honest and respectable, and less bitter about the note: indeed, he was almost glad to think he should never receive the money, — that money so hardly earned, — it would be linked with so many hateful associations. He felt he would rather wait to pay his debts with the new, clean money gained in an honorable service.

Thus toiling cheerfully and faithfully through the first week, when he was called up Saturday night, and paid his wages without having to wait and dun and scheme to get them, he felt a new sensation. He felt like a new man, the world like a new world, and his humble attic like a veritable palace, when he got home, and sat down to count over his little store, which, after saving barely enough for his meagre fare, he straight-way put by for a sinking-fund towards his debts.

One day, after he had been in his new place for

several weeks, the judge called him in, and asked him if he knew how to search a title.

"Oh, yes!" said Joe: "I've done a good deal of that."

"Very well: here are some papers; you will find a plan and a description of the property amongst them. Take hold, and look up the title, and when you get through, hand in your searches to me to examine."

Joe took the papers, and retired: he was busy with the matter nearly a week, and then laid his book containing the result of his work upon the judge's table as he was told.

Several days passed, and he heard nothing of the matter, when late one afternoon he was summoned to his employer's room. The latter sat gazing intently at Joe's minutes.

"What's this, Piverton?"

"Which, sir?" exclaimed Joe in some trepidation.

"What's all this mean?"

"Ah!" said Joe, taking a look, "that's another matter: here's your estate farther along."

"What estate is this?"

"Why — er — that? That is the Damen — the Gould estate."

"How comes it here?"

"I looked it up for Mr. Ferrette."

"This, then, is Ferrette's book?"

"No: oh, no! It's my own private book. I jotted down minutes of searches here, and then I copied them out fair in the big book of titles at the office."

"How came you to be looking up the Damen estate?"

"I had orders to do it. I never myself quite understood why, till this very minute, sir; but now I think I see it plain enough. I remember Mr. Ferrette's saying it was for somebody else, and hinting I might get a fee out of it, which I never did. I see now it was Blau wanted it: he was going to buy the property. Yes, it must have been for Blau."

"Did Ferrette examine this search?"

"I can't say as to that."

"Hm-m! That will do, Piverton."

Joe withdrew, wondering a little at his employer's strange interest in a case already settled. The judge, meantime, paced up and down his office, revolving the matter, long after his clerks had all gone. He took down books, and looked up the law; again and again he consulted Joe's book, until he was compelled by the waning light to stop. The next and several succeeding days, he returned to the subject, whenever occasion allowed, and, after an apparently careful examination, sat down one evening just before leaving the office, and wrote the following note: —

MY DEAR MRS. GOULD, — You will be surprised, of course, at the resurrection of "*Badger agst. Gould*," but Damen's Ghost apparently will not down. The new phase of the subject which I have to present is interesting: it is occasioned by my accidental discovery of a flaw in the title; that is, in your husband's title, and, of course, in that of the present holders.

The matter is too elaborate to put upon paper. My present point is this: There are somewhere parties in interest, who are own ignorant of their rights, and who, when they learn them, will probably shrink from enforcing them, and be glad to dispose of them at a fair compensation; that is, a nominal price. These claims, it may pay you to buy up and prosecute. I have no doubt we can recover, when we get the matter in a right shape. I have taken no steps, nor made any inquiries yet. The subject is worth your attention. Can you call in and see me? My personal interest in the defeat of these creatures is such, that I will cheerfully give my own time and services if necessary: however, that would all be arranged very easily. Shall I see you?

Very respectfully yours,

SAMUEL CLARK.

P. S. This, perhaps, should be addressed to your son; but, as my previous correspondence has all been with you, I yield to the old habit. Please consult Mr. Gould, and let me have a joint answer.

Mrs. Gould's answer was not long delayed. The second day saw it lying upon her counsel's table. He took it up, and hurriedly broke the seal. It ran, —

MY DEAR JUDGE, — Not even the certainty — much less the doubtful hope you present — of winning back our lost estate and our old home, would tempt me to enter again upon litigation. I have had enough of law. Failing justice, I will seek peace. I thank God for what is left us, and try to be content. I do not even rejoice at the discovery you have made. I am weary of the whole subject. As for those wretched creatures, whom I may call, I suppose, my enemies, I hope I am magnanimous enough to wish them no harm. My son concurs with me. We thank you heartily for your interest in the matter, but can give you no encouragement, and wish you better clients.

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

ANNE GOULD.

CHAPTER V.

LIGHT.

"GLORY!" murmured Noll, as he stood one evening at the window, looking at the sunset.

"That is a word I shall never know the meaning of," said a voice behind.

Turning, he saw Naomi, who had entered the room noiselessly, standing a few paces behind him. Her remark, her tone and striking attitude, all combined to arrest his attention. Now, as often, the intensity of the passing thought seemed so to possess her, that not only her face, but her delicate nervous hands extended slightly forward, in fine, her whole person, seemed instinct with the same expression,—that of irrepressible yearning,—as she stood flooded from head to foot in the crimson glow.

"What word?"

"Glory."

"Why?"

"Because it means light."

Noll made no answer, but stood silently gazing at the absorbed face.

"What is light?" she asked impatiently, raising her large sightless eyes in the very track of the sun's level rays. "Nobody tells me clearly. They try to; but they halt, they quibble, they end by saying nothing."

"Light," answered Noll, after a moment's hesitation, "is a terrible truth-teller, that sweeps over the earth, showing up all its weak points, all its cracks and seams and spots and scars and ragged edges; bringing out all the dirt and squalor, age and ugliness, vice and

rotteness. Don't pine for light: be thankful for darkness."

"Do you think such equivocation deceives me or comforts me? I know," she exclaimed, starting forward, with hands outstretched towards the window, "that there is glory — surpassing glory — blazing here before me. I feel it. It thrills me. I would give years of my life to see it, to look upon it for one single moment; but I never, never shall. O merciful God, pity me! I never shall."

Noll was dumb. He was shocked. He had never heard such an outbreak as this. Indeed, one of their chief consolations with regard to Naomi's infirmity had been her supposed reconciliation to it.

"I have been deceived all my life," she continued, coming close to the window: "everybody deceives me. Why do they? Why do you? It would be far kinder to answer me."

"What shall I say?"

"Here is something before us: if it is real, it can be described. You receive certain impressions: why cannot you convey them to me? Any thing can be described, unless it be a mystery."

"It is a mystery — more or less."

"Oh! I feared so; I hoped so. Yet there must be a great deal to tell. Do you know," she said, lowering her voice, "when I was a child, I used to think the sun must be" —

"What?"

"God himself."

"So have millions of others — the fire-worshippers."

"Are there no books about light?" she asked, presently returning to the subject.

"Yes, many: shall I get one and read to you?"

"Will you? will you?" she cried eagerly; adding, however, in a moment half coldly, —

"But no; it will be too" —

"What?"

"Too much trouble."

"Not at all: I shall be learning myself."

"What! Don't you know?"

"No. I have made a go at that, as at a good many other things, without accomplishing much; but I have had the thing itself, you must remember, always before me. Ah! mysteries are common. We cease to be curious about them. We are mysteries ourselves."

"True. Will it tell of color, too, in the book?" she asked, still returning to the subject.

"Oh, yes!"

"Thank Heaven, I shall know, then, at last!"

"Know?"

"What I have been waiting years and years to learn; what I have thought over and dreamed over; what I have tried to imagine; for I have thought out a color-scheme of my own. Do you want to hear it? I can tell you better in music. Listen!"

She went and sat down at the piano. Noll gazed after her with curious interest. He had not yet recovered from his surprise at her singular mood.

She began to play a slow movement with great power and largeness of style. "See," she cried, whirling about on the stool as she finished, "that is an *adagio*; it represents a color; it is red,—the most splendid of them all, deep, vivid, intense, overpowering."

Noll regarded her in silent wonder. He saw what she meant. She had conceived the spirit and value of the color marvellously. She had translated it into music. His own imagination, kindled by the superior force of hers, almost felt the air glow about them.

Presently she played again in a very different key and tempo. "This," she said, talking as she played, "is my favorite: it is an *andante*. I love it: I think of the sky and sea. It rests me: it is broad and

grand and expansive, yet so pensive and tender, — it is blue."

Noll, yielding to the enthusiasm of the player, listened with close attention. He saw that what she was saying was to her no pretty conceit, but a conviction.

"You will not have to ask what this is meant for," she cried, suddenly starting off with an *allegro* movement: "you cannot mistake it. How gay, how cheerful, how hopeful it is! Do you not see the *green* grass springing, the *green* leaves shooting, all nature smiling in freshest verdure? But," she continued presently, modulating gradually as she spoke to a slow, stately *largo*, "how different, how very different, is this, so rich and sombre and soothing, so full of dignity and repose, so full of fancy and suggestion! — it is purple, royal Tyrian purple, made for the vestments of kings and priests. Purple," she repeated: "the color must be something like the word, I think, — deep and gloomful, with no shine or glitter to it."

The movement ended impressively with some fine chords. There was a moment's pause; when, suddenly throwing her head back, and swaying her body to and fro with an almost childish *abandon*, she went dashing off in another movement of exceeding fire and spirit. "But here is shine and glitter — shine and glitter enough. Isn't it rattling and rushing and rollicking?" she cried breathlessly. "Do you not feel the sun shining, — the golden, glorious sun? Do you not hear gold ringing, — bright gleaming ingots of clinking gold? Isn't it yellow, yellow, yellow — as yellow as can be? There!" she concluded with a long breath, "those are my colors; that is, some of them. That's my color-symphony. I love it. I have thought and worked over it hours and hours. It may be all wrong. I dread to think so. Has it any truth? Tell me!"

"Yes, a great deal," said Noll, gazing at the player in wonder.

The incident was not without effect. Noll brought home the book on light, as he had promised, and sat down to read it to his cousin. It was plainly a work of pure benevolence. It is greatly to be feared, that, at first, he was sadly bored. Sitting down to study a new science was no more alluring to him than to the majority of young men engaged in active business, who have for some years given over study. But the eager, intent face of his listener, as she drank in every word, the tireless attention with which she followed him, even into the driest and most technical details, together with a certain charm in the subject itself, gradually awoke in him an interest approaching enthusiasm.

And so, night after night, the reading and discussion went on. Mrs. Gould sat by knitting, and listening or not as she chose, seemingly well content that Noll had found such wholesome and profitable diversion.

Meantime the listener showed her gratitude for the sacrifice her cousin was making, plainly enough. She treated him with surprising forbearance, controlled her own irritability, and submitted patiently to his whims, which were not few — for he had taken latterly to tyrannizing over the household in his old boyish fashion. Where formerly there had been instant rebellion on the least show of dictation, now it was, "Miss Dill, come here: I want to talk to you;" or, "Miss Dill, put down that sewing, and go play me some music;" or, again, "Miss Dill, get on your hat, and come out for a walk." And, strange to say, Miss Dill, no longer demurring to the obnoxious name, very meekly and promptly obeyed.

As for Noll, he was quite oblivious of this change in his listener's manner, as, for a long time, he was of that in her looks. The latter struck him suddenly one day as she was going through the room, romping with

the dog. The exercise had flushed her cheeks, and brightened her eyes : her hair was a little dishevelled, and there was a very unusual *abandon* in her manner. He uttered an exclamation. His mother looked up from her book.

"What has come over Miss Dill lately?" he said.

"She is glad to have something to do, I think. She is the housekeeper now. I have given her the keys," returned Mrs. Gould, with the air of one who had solved the problem.

The young housekeeper, it should be said, however, showed a proper respect for her own authority, and in her official capacity still made a sturdy stand for her rights.

Jingling along the hall one Saturday morning, she came up to him, as he was getting ready to go to town, and demanded what he would have for Sunday's dinner.

"Something good, Miss Dill, for I am to have company."

"What is good?"

"Here, take this pencil, and write. I will make the bill of fare."

"Very good," said Naomi, seating herself at the hall table. "I am ready."

"First, then, mock-turtle soup" —

"The cook cannot make that."

"Boiled salmon, broiled quail" —

"Stop, stop, — not fish and game too!"

"A pair of capons, roast."

"No, no : we can't have all that. It's too extravagant."

"There, give me back my pencil" —

"We might have soup and fish" —

"Go your ways!"

"And a joint," continued the young housekeeper with unmoved gravity. "Which shall it be, beef, or mutton?"

"Either, neither, both — whichever you like. I wash my hands of it."

"Would you like a salad, or a side-dish?"

"Have done, I say!"

"What will you have for dessert?"

"Nothing. You are a skinflint, a screw, a Do-the-boy Squeers! Go, mix your brimstone and molasses. Keep away from me — your presence is stifling!"

The young housekeeper jingled her keys, and laughed as if this abuse were not ungrateful to her; as if it were intended, indeed, as a compliment. But we regret to add, that, after making thrift an especial study for six days in the week, the same economical young woman went to any length of extravagance on the seventh, to gratify the dainty tastes of the pampered young lord of the manor, — a folly in which, we are sorry to say, his lordship's excellent and otherwise most sensible mamma abetted her.

But while our young housekeeper goes on her brightening way, studying cookery and optics, we find the light upon our canvas has been shifting too, until she who before stood in the half-shadow of the background has come suddenly into the full blaze of the foreground. Let us mark the change. O magic change! O wizard light!

CHAPTER VI.

A DISCOVERY.

MRS. GOULD sat knitting in her little parlor. She had taken to knitting a good deal of late. It was a convenient excuse for sitting still, a pretty mask for idleness. It furnished, moreover, a soothing *pianissimo* accompaniment to thoughts that ran ceaselessly up and down the scale in every key, major or minor.

With whatever thoughts she is now busy, she evidently finds nothing disturbing. Her absorbed face is serene. The storm that has passed over her is already misty in the distance, its flying shadows spanned by a brilliant bow of promise. The present is safe. She is at peace.

Peace! and what is peace? Bold hearts have they who dare lay claim to that impalpable something which the next breath of wind, the next opening of a door, the next word of a dearest friend, the next flash of the electric wire, the next ring of the postman, may destroy.

Unsuspecting Mrs. Gould! Her hardly-earned peace is already doomed. The bolt that is to shiver it, that is to rend her heart anew, is already hurtling through the twilight air.

Noll was lounging in an easy-chair near by, reading the evening's paper. He had come home unexpectedly, on an earlier train than usual. His mother had been having a little gossip with him about his business. His accounts were unusually promising, and perhaps Mrs. Gould's thoughts were higher-winged accordingly.

Presently the door opened, and Naomi came in, her keys jingling upon her finger. She paused a moment near the threshold with a pre-occupied air, as if deciding some household question. She presented at the moment a very pretty study of color, with her dress of turquoise blue, her Roman mosaic brooch, her luminous complexion, her shining black hair gathered into a net of gold-thread, and a beautiful Indian shawl trailing from her arm.

After a moment's hesitation, she put the keys in her pocket, and advanced directly towards the chair where Noll was sitting. With a mischievous look, he held up a cautioning finger to his mother, who smiled faintly, but shook her head in disapproval. As she neared the chair, Naomi put out her hands, and, in a moment more, placed them plump in Noll's large palms waiting to receive them.

Why did Mrs. Gould's smile fade so quickly from her lips? Why did her eyes assume such a startled look? What had happened? Why, a very little thing, a very common thing. A thing that happens in your house, in my house, in Smith's, Jones's, or Robinson's house, every day in the year. But from that little thing Mrs. Gould had made a discovery.

A momentous discovery. Where had been her eyes? Where had been her wits? What had she been thinking of?

Naomi did not start nor cry out, when she so unexpectedly came upon her cousin. She only blushed, — blushed rosy red, and said in a low, pleased voice, —

“When did you get home?”

This commonplace incident may seem very insufficient cause for such consternation, but Mrs. Gould trusts her own eyes and judgment. Mrs. Gould chooses to take alarm.

A girl's blush, — a mere tendency of blood to the head, — what does it signify? And what has Mrs. Gould to do with it?

Mrs. Gould may ask herself this question. She may, too, ask herself what was the issue of a certain other affair with which she had too much to do years ago ; and whether her interference then was productive of good, or ill? Will these questions find a candid answer? Will they affect Mrs. Gould's action?

Let us see.

For the present she is reticent. At tea, and during the evening, she says very little. But this causes no remark : she is seldom talkative.

But, if her tongue is still, her eyes are busy enough. The young people, however, do not notice it. They are occupied with their reading and discussion, their music, and what not.

Another surprise awaits Mrs. Gould. Where is her leopard,—her beautiful, mottled, fierce, silent, velvety-footed pet? Alas! the splendid creature has changed its spots: it has become a lamb, a mild, obedient mutton. Miss Dill is told imperatively to put aside her needle-work, and play some music. Miss Dill obeys. Miss Dill is directed to stop playing that solemn stuff, and play something worth while ; and Miss Dill, without a gun fired in favor of her adored Schumann, rattles away at Herr Strauss. Later, Miss Dill is bidden to get out the chess-board : she gets it, nay, sits down with her imperious taskmaster, and quietly plays a game, which by means of an excellent memory, and marvellous nicety of touch, she does surprisingly well. In all of which, Miss Dill is only going through a routine which has been repeated night after night before the unconscious eyes that are now regarding her so keenly and suspiciously.

The result of Mrs. Gould's discovery did not immediately appear. She took time for reflection. She had therefore, doubtless, well weighed her purpose, when, two or three days afterwards, she said quietly to Naomi at luncheon, "I see they are going to have

some frolic up at the asylum. Would you like to go, my dear?"

"Yes, very much."

"You might take a change of clothes, stay two or three days, and make them a little visit, as they have invited you so often."

"But I — that is — I must not leave you alone."

"Oh! never mind me. A little exercise will do me good. I am getting too lazy. We shall both be the better for the change."

Naomi was not surprised. Cousin Anne often planned little pleasures of the kind for her. Moreover, she liked to go to the asylum, where she was well acquainted with the officers, teachers, and pupils, and where she was treated with distinction, on account of the many benefits which Mrs. Gould had bestowed upon the institution. Indeed, it was the only place she ever went from home to visit.

"When is it to be?" she asked at length.

"To-morrow afternoon and evening. I am going to the city, and will take you. We will go by the early train."

Naomi gladly availed herself of her cousin's suggestion, and went to town with her on the morrow. What Mrs. Gould's purpose was in making the arrangement, will appear more or less clearly as we get on. Meanwhile, she had time to think. Noll came home the same evening in excellent spirits: he threw himself into his accustomed chair, discussed the day's news with his mother, read the evening's paper, played with his dog, and whiled away an hour or more before dinner without noting Naomi's absence.

It was not until the bell rang, and he rose to offer his mother an arm, that he asked, —

"What's got Miss Dill?"

"She has gone visiting."

"Where?"

"To the asylum."

"What did she go there for?"

"A little amusement."

"She must be in a strait for amusement. It's strange that women must always be amused."

A slight shade of depression crept over Mrs. Gould's composed face at her son's tone.

"Naomi seldom goes anywhere," she explained briefly. "There is to be an entertainment there this evening, and I thought she had better go."

"Then she will be away for the night?"

"She will be away for several days."

"Whew!" whistled Oliver. "She might better serve a term in the penitentiary."

"*She* is interested," returned Mrs. Gould a little coldly. "She gets many new ideas and suggestions. She likes to go, and I am glad to have her."

"Humph!"

"Besides," she continued in a carefully careless way, "I want to keep up her connection with the asylum, and interest in it."

"Pray, why?" asked Noll with an astonished look.

"Because," answered Mrs. Gould pointedly, "her future is very uncertain, and she may some time be thrown upon her own resources."

"What then?"

"In such case the asylum could help her better than any one else," continued Mrs. Gould, disregarding her son's look of indignation. "I can no longer provide for her as I once hoped to. At my death she will be left dependent and helpless, and I want to provide against it."

"There, Queeny dear, eat your dinner, and don't go into the indigo business."

"I have been considering the subject a good deal of late," pursued Mrs. Gould, bent on her point; "and I have been seriously thinking of suggesting to Naomi

to take a position in the asylum for a while as teacher of music."

"You'd better send her out washing and ironing."

"It would be little more than recreation to her now: it would give her experience, and might open the way to permanent employment in case she ever wants it."

"She is not fit to be a teacher."

"She is a very accomplished musician."

"She has neither patience nor nerve nor self-control enough for a teacher," said Noll more positively.

"I am beginning to think she has a good deal more of them all than we have given her credit for."

"She never shall be a teacher if I" — Noll stopped in his very emphatic speech. His mother was looking at him with an indescribable expression of pain and disappointment.

"Well!" she said dryly.

"If I am consulted in the matter," he concluded, reddening slightly at his own vehemence.

Mrs. Gould said no more. If she had been less absorbed in carrying out her plans she might have perceived that she was making a serious mistake.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. GOULD MAKES UP HER MIND.

DISCOVERIES are for the most part but brilliant guesses. Discoverers are apt to leap to conclusions, and plod over the dusty road of proof afterwards. From a mere hint, from ever so slight a cue, they fly over all obstacles to the remote end. Sometimes this is the instinct of genius, and the new continent is found in the wild waste of waters: sometimes it is the illusion of fancy, and the land of promise turns out to be a mirage.

Mrs. Gould would gladly have stultified her reason to appease her heart. She would have welcomed a mirage. She longed to find herself wrong, but alas! she was forced to let go, one by one, the feeble doubts she had nourished as to the truth of her conjecture.

Noll proved dismal company enough while his cousin was away. He yawned shamelessly in his mother's face. He went straight to sleep after dinner. He was bored with every thing. He brought out the books on "Light," which had held his interest so long, as by a spell; listlessly turned the leaves, and threw them down: their charm had fled. He went and thrummed upon the piano: it was tuneless now. He came yawning back to his newspaper, and presently nodded off to sleep.

The third day a teacher from the asylum brought Naomi home. She was in high spirits, and full of her visit, of which she was giving cousin Anne an animated account when Noll came in. He put on an air of sternness as she ran towards him crying, —

"Where *are* you? How do you do?"

"Go away, vagrant!"

"Shake hands!"

"Stand off! I have nothing to say to truants."

"I am not a truant: I had leave to go."

"I gave you no leave."

"It was none of your business — rude fellow! He *shall* shake hands with me; shall he not, cousin Anne?" she cried, darting forward in pursuit of him as he retreated around the table.

"Do not be a tease, Noll!" said Mrs. Gould, a little impatiently.

"The hand of Douglas is his own," cried Noll, holding his arms above his head, when he was at length captured.

"Give me your paw, old *Grizzly*!"

"Go back to your asylum."

"I will go back to cousin Anne. I don't care to shake hands with a bear."

"Sour grapes!"

Returning to her seat, Naomi went on with her story. She had never been seen in such spirits: she was fairly garrulous. Perhaps it was this that prevented her noticing cousin Anne's distraction.

After dinner cousin Anne took a book, and thus the talk was left to the young folks.

Noll was sitting before the fire, smoking, when his cousin came up, and dropped a book in his lap.

"What's that?"

"The book."

"What book?" continued the hypocrite with his head thrown back in his easy-chair, and the smoke from his cigar rising in a cloud to the ceiling.

"Our book, of course."

"What's it doing here?"

"Waiting for you to read."

"Oh!"

"Go on."

"I beg pardon?"

"I'm all ready."

"Indeed!"

"It's the two hundred and twenty-ninth page."

"Don't talk about pages to me! Don't bring your books here. Go back to your asylum."

"Shall I find the place? See, we are losing time. I have knit a whole round."

"Don't think to impose on me, miss, with your sham interest in science! Go back to your institution! Continue your eleemosynary career, Mrs. Pardiggle!"

"Did you miss me?"

"Not a bit."

"I missed cousin Anne and you wofully."

"Pooh!"

"I had a very, very good time; but I'm delighted to get home again."

"Blarney!"

"What, haven't you found the place yet? Give me the book: I can do it; I turned down a leaf."

"Don't trouble yourself. If you want to be useful, go play some music."

"Cousin Anne is reading."

"Never mind cousin Anne. She likes it; she's a dear old lady; she reads better in a noise."

"Will you read the book when I get through?"

"Hm—m, perhaps!"

If cousin Anne was reading all this time, she turned very few leaves; if she was listening, she gave very little apparent heed; if she was thinking, she had occasion for it. The problem before her was not easy. It is doubtful if she had ever addressed herself to one more delicate and difficult. It is no wonder, then, that, for several days and nights, she turned very few leaves, and gave little apparent heed to the idle talk about her.

Mrs. Gould's natural way to any end she proposed to herself was the straightest the case admitted of.

But what was the end she now proposed, — the natural, proper, safe, successful, happy end? Evidently Mrs. Gould had not determined. It behooved her to take care, and she did take care. Whatever might be the consequences of her action, she could never accuse herself of want of deliberation. Meantime she treated her kinswoman with even more than her wonted kindness and consideration. And the latter, after drinking and basking in the light all these months, — light, be it said, not all scientific, — seemed now to be filled and transfused with it. She became, in turn, a source, and began to give it forth. The flame leaped up upon the altar of her own heart: the long darkness was illumined, and glory was no longer a mystery.

A week passed before Mrs. Gould made up her mind. Once decided, she did not hesitate. The recurrence of a certain anniversary gave her a fitting opportunity to speak. It was late in the afternoon as she and Naomi were sitting together sewing.

"This is the 25th, my dear."

"Yes."

"How long is it?"

"Ten years ago. I often wonder what would have become of me; I often wonder if I should have lived in that horrible place if you had not come for me. No, I should have died. It stifled me. And that odious woman! Oh, cousin Anne, God must have prompted you to do that!"

A disturbance — a something almost amounting to a blush — passed over Mrs. Gould's face. Perhaps she found it a little difficult to go on.

"Ten years!" she repeated. "It seems twenty: it seems a lifetime. They have been long years, hard years, trying years; they have made a wreck of me; I shall never be the same again."

"You are just the same, always the same to me; always, as I saw you first in that — that place."

"My child, I do not deceive myself. I see the change, I feel it. I am an old woman. I have lived to lay in the grave all my own family, all my early friends ; I have lived to see the fortune my dear husband left torn from my hands by robbers, under the guise of law ; I have lived to see every object of my early hopes and ambition withered to ashes ; I have lived, my dear, to become a poor, desolate old creature, who is weary of life."

Such words of weakness from the firm, proud lips of her kinswoman, shocked and bewildered Naomi.

"Cousin, cousin," she cried, "do not talk so !"

"I have but one thing left in the world, one solace, one hope."

"Noll !" interjected Naomi breathlessly.

"Yes : God vouchsafes me yet that blessing ; but — I know not for how long."

A little tremor, a mere creeping of the flesh, a chill of foreboding, passed over the hearer. Mrs. Gould, with her eyes fixed anxiously upon that sensitive, tell-tale face, went on, —

"I have pleased myself in forecasting his future ; in hoping that he might become something more than a galley-slave in a treadmill ; that he might gain enough to escape from this ; to lead a larger life ; grow to his full stature ; acquire and wield a noble influence ; become an honor to his country, to his race, to his name."

There was no comment. The dead silence of the room was broken only by the dull ticking of the clock as Mrs. Gould paused, —

"All this is within his grasp. He has but to reach out his hand, and take it ; he has only to be true to himself. But he has no worldly wisdom ; he is heedless of any consideration of prudence. To gratify a passing impulse, he would recklessly forfeit the chances of a lifetime."

The look of tense, strained attention on the blind girl's face began to give way to another look, a look of

quicken'd intelligence, as though some new idea were dawning upon her,—a look that spread like a light over her delicate features, leaving them as white as marble, and rigid as stone.

"To succeed in the race he has to run, he must not be hampered; he must be embarrassed by no social obstacles; he must be held to his work, and saved from his own impulses; he must find in his friends, in his companions, in his family, only strong, helpful, impelling hands."

Mrs. Gould paused. Her eyes were riveted upon the pallid face of her listener. She saw that she had not talked in vain. There was a silence of several minutes. Presently Naomi rose. She spoke in a strange, spasmodic way; she could not complete a sentence; she seemed to choke in the midst of it, not with tears, but with a sudden, parched dryness of her throat.

"I hope Noll will be—all that you wish. I hope he will—be fortunate. I hope—he will be rich and successful and famous. I know—he is generous and magnanimous. I thank God that he is. He will—be blessed for it. He has had great trials. I hope—he will have no more. I hope you will—have no ground for your fears. I hope you will—have him to yourself as long—as you live. I—I hope—he will be happy."

She turned, and walked out of the room. A sudden fall was heard outside. Mrs. Gould hurried to the door, and found her kinswoman lying unconscious upon the floor of the hall.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CRUSHING ANSWER.

NAOMI was plainly not of the happy sort, who come and go amid the brilliant throngs of Vanity Fair, holding their rueful aspect safe hidden under a smiling mask. Perhaps she had not learned the untold solace of a mask. Perhaps she would have found the ghastly shell a little stifling. Far from assuming any such conventional disguise, she seems not to have been alive to the need of putting on a decent pretence of indifference. She went her way with no moan or outcry indeed, but showing plainly enough the hurt she had received, and looking pitifully wretched. Meantime, she attended to her house-keeping as usual ; nay, she was more assiduous than ever. She found a wonderful number of new things to do, that left her very little time to sit with the family of an evening. She came in, to be sure, when Noll called her. She listened attentively when he read, she played when he asked her ; but she was far from being the young woman of yesterday, with the beaming face and the jingling keys.

As for Noll, it will be remembered that he is not particularly quick to notice the little meteorological changes in the domestic atmosphere ; but, in the course of time, even he must needs remark the change in his cousin's manner, — remark that she no longer brings her book to him to read, that she takes care never to be left alone with him, that she laboriously includes his mother in all their conversations, and that she avoids him on every possible occasion. He does remark it all in his own time. He stares at his cousin

with big eyes, and can make nothing out of her ; and in his perplexity goes off to consult his mother as to what can be the matter with Miss Dill.

"She does not seem quite well," says Mrs. Gould with entire truthfulness. "Take no notice : it will soon pass away. She was always fitful."

"She was never like this. In the old days, when any thing was wrong, there was a flash or two of lightning, and the sky was cleared."

Mrs. Gould was silent for obvious reasons. Perhaps she did not consider herself accountable for the negative inferences to be drawn from her silence. She, at least, saved herself from any charge of direct dissimulation, by leaving her son to brood over the matter by himself. Meantime, she scorned to exercise any surveillance over the young people. She took care to leave them every opportunity for the freest intercourse.

Following his mother's hint, Noll kept up his old lordly fashion of the imperative mood, as though nothing were the matter. And Naomi made no demur, but came and went quite passively at his beck. But when, one day, with a sudden impulse he put out his large hand, and gently stroked her head, she started as if smitten with a sharp pang.

"What's the matter, little one?" he asked gently, leaning over her chair.

Her lips quivered. She choked as if with a rising sob, and, jumping up, hurried from the room without a word.

This inexplicable behavior seems to have confirmed Noll in a purpose of having a speedy explanation. He came home early one afternoon, when he knew his mother had gone to town. The parlor door was ajar. He went in softly. Naomi was at the piano. She was playing in a wild, abandoned way, as if struggling to pour out upon those poor metal wires all the upstored bitterness of her heart. Soul and body were racked in

the effort: her lips quivered, her bosom heaved, the tears streamed unheeded down her cheeks.

Noll gazed at her in astonishment, made a movement as if to withdraw, but presently sat down, and waited for her to finish.

"Naomi," he said, as she lifted her hands from the keys.

She sprang from her seat like a frightened bird, then turning, cried indignantly, —

"How came you here? You have no right to intrude upon me."

"No, I have not. I did not mean to. The door was open, and you did not hear me. I did not want to stop you. Do you think I would take an unfair advantage of you?"

"No, oh, no! it is all right," she cried, moving quickly towards the door.

"It is not all right," he said, stepping before her, and holding her gently by the arm. "Something is very wrong. I have come to see what it is."

"Let me go, let me go," she cried almost angrily. "I will not stay here. I will not talk to you."

"Go, then," he said coldly, "since we are no longer friends."

He released her, walked to the window, and sat down with averted face.

"Do not say that, — oh, do not say that!" she cried, following him in a piteous, appealing way.

"Then sit down here," he continued, drawing her to a seat by his side, "and tell me why have you been behaving so?"

"Do not ask me: I cannot tell you."

"Have I injured you?"

"No."

"Have I offended you?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then why do you avoid me?"

"Because — because I must. It is in my fate. It

is a part of the curse that hangs over me ; that nas hung over me ever since I was born ; that " —

"Stop : you are talking wildly. Calm yourself, and listen to me. There is nothing in your life that has not always been there. You have lived with us since you were a child. Formerly you were little more to me than a shadow that came and went. But latterly we have been thrown together : we have learned to know each other. We were beginning to be very happy, when suddenly you turn away from me, avoid me, hate me perhaps " —

"No, no, no, no !"

"Nothing new has happened. There is no new cause to account for it. What does it mean ?"

"Something has happened : there is cause. Oh, there is cause !"

"Tell me, then, what it is."

"I cannot, I cannot. You must not ask me. Believe me, it is necessary. We must cease to be friends. We cannot live in this way. The light, — O Heavenly Father, the light ! I have seen it ; I have known it ; but it must fade away. It is fading now. I am cursed. I was born in the darkness. I must return to it."

She sank to the floor, and buried her face in her hands.

"Hush, hush ! you are excited ; you are ill. You are talking things that have no meaning. You have imagined something. Nothing real has changed us from what we were a few days ago. Were we not happy then ? Stop and think. I am here, your old playmate, friend, and brother, the same that I have always been. You are the same. What has happened ? Nothing. Listen : I am going to say something serious to you."

He bent over and caressed her head gently, as it lay upon the cushion of the chair before him. He paused as if to constrain himself to speak quietly.

"I, too, have been in the darkness," he went on, "a long, long time. But I have at length found the light—or dream that I have. Will you snatch it from me? I, too, tremble to think of going back into that darkness again. Naomi, you brought the light to me. You, yourself, are the light. I cannot live without it. I must"—

"Stop, stop! Do not, do not! You must not talk like that!" she cried, springing up with an air of terror.

"I must say what I came to say. I have waited a long time to do it; waited to try myself, to make quite sure"—

"Oh, spare me, spare me!" she cried, shuddering from head to foot, and sobbing convulsively.

"Listen! Do not answer now. Take time to think. Wait until you are calm, then think it all over: think that I am the dearest friend you have on earth; think that I love you; that, as God gives me strength, I will devote my life to you; that I will try to make you happy; try to bring back the light, and keep it. Think that my happiness hangs on your word. Think"—

"Stop! Oh, stop, for pity's—for mercy's sake! I must not listen."

"Naomi"—

"It cannot be. No—never—never—never!"

"Why? Tell me why."

She suddenly rose, fixed her beautiful sightless eyes upon him, paused as if to steady herself, and said in a breathless voice,—

"Because I do not love you."

She turned, and fled from the room like a shadow. He sat motionless in his place; and there, an hour afterwards, his mother found him still brooding over that crushing answer amidst the gathering shadows, with the old fixed, haggard look upon his face.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR.

ONE day Mrs. Gould was surprised by a visit from Judge Clark. It was several weeks after she had received and answered his letter.

"Mahomet has come to the mountain, you see," he said, shaking hands with her heartily.

"And he is very welcome, I am sure," said Mrs. Gould cordially, "but would be a great deal more so if I felt sure he didn't come on business."

"Thank you," returned the judge, laughing. "I fear I must satisfy myself, then, with the lesser welcome, hoping presently to earn the greater."

"No, no: I see what you mean, but you need never expect to awaken my interest in that wretched matter again. The burnt child dreads the fire. I am slow in learning a lesson, but I never forget it."

"But the lesson is not learned till you get to the end of the chapter."

"Ah! I got to the end of a good many chapters, judge, without learning any lesson but disappointment and disgust."

"True: I will not deny, you had rather a hard experience. The facts were against you, the law was against you, and there was nothing but a thin showing of abstract right upon your side. This is all very well in the pulpit and in romances, but it will not do in real life. The trouble is, you had no case from the beginning. I think I intimated"—

"Oh, yes! you did your whole duty; I have nothing to complain of; but I have done with the matter now.

I have dismissed it from my thoughts forever ; so let us talk of something else."

"Why — ha — the fact is, as you suspect, it is precisely that that I came to talk about."

"Didn't you get my letter?"

"Yes."

"And will you not take no for an answer?"

"I took it for an answer to one question. I come now with another. Will you hear it?"

"Oh, yes !" said Mrs. Gould, smiling. "I will hear any thing else. I am open to conviction upon every subject — but one. Pray, proceed."

"I have already told you, that, by a mere accident, I discovered a flaw in the title to the Damen estate."

Mrs. Gould nodded.

"I have since, notwithstanding your unfavorable answer, made a few inquiries on my own account. The story is rather curious : it may interest you."

"I have no doubt it will — as a story."

"I may premise that I had at first much difficulty in following up the trail I struck, on account of all the parties having died or disappeared ; but faith and patience at length accomplished it. It seems," continued the judge, taking a small memorandum-book from his pocket, and referring to it occasionally as he spoke, "that 'Damen's Row' was formerly in the possession of one Peter Van Voort, a worthy old Knickerbocker Dutchman, who died in the year 1761, devising it to — this is the language of the will — '*My brother Cornelius and the heirs of his body ; but, if he shall die without issue, then to my brother Thomas and his heirs in fee.*'"

"Then the ghost may be of Dutch extraction, too," said Mrs. Gould, smiling.

"This language," continued the judge gravely, "according to the old common law, which had not then been modified by statute, created an entail."

"An entail being, I suppose," again interrupted

Mrs. Gould, "a case where the estate descends from the father to the eldest son, and in default of sons to the daughters in due succession, like the English law of primogeniture."

"Yes: it is where the descent is limited to a certain line of heirs, and where the tenant or holder for the time being has no power of alienation; no power, that is, of making over the estate to another by deed, will, or otherwise," explained the judge. "But to continue. This Cornelius Van Voort died in 1765, leaving the estate in due course to his daughter and only child Anna, who was already married at the time of her father's death, having issue two sons and a daughter. She, in turn, died soon after in 1770, devising this estate — mark the point — to her daughter Susan, to the exclusion of her two sons."

"She had no right to do that," interjected Mrs. Gould, becoming interested.

"No, it was a fatal error. That one weak spot taints all subsequent conveyance. The tenant in tail could not devise: she had only a life-estate. Estates tail had not then been abolished: the statute doing away with them was passed some years later, — in 1782, I think, — too late to have any effect upon this transaction."

"And what was the precise result of this error?"

"The devise, of course, was simply nugatory. All subsequent holders of the property, whether by descent or purchase, took it subject to this power of defeasance in the rightful heir; that is, the issue of the two sons."

"But that was nearly a hundred years ago. I thought that after a certain lapse of time" —

"Ah! one minute: I am coming to that directly. There is a most extraordinary concurrence of circumstances here. But let me finish my chain of title first. We have brought it down now to this young woman Susan, the daughter of Anna, and granddaughter of old Cornelius Van Voort. Now, it was precisely this

young woman, Susan, who, after many years, conveyed it to James Gould, your husband, in 1810."

"Indeed! I never knew whom he bought of."

"Now," continued the judge, polishing his eye-glass upon his pocket-handkerchief with the deliberate air of one who pauses upon the brink of a revelation, secure of his audience,— "now we come to the singular part of the case. The daughter Susan having no right to the property, let us go back to the sons. There were two, as I said, — Lewis and Robert. According to the law of entails, the estate went first to Lewis. But Lewis was *non-compos*. Now, the law is very tender of the rights of the weak-minded. Idiocy is a disability which suspends the operation of the statute of limitations."

"You mean" —

"I mean that it was for Lewis to recover back the property that rightfully belonged to him; but the fact was, he remained an idiot all his life, dying in 1854, at the extraordinary age of ninety years, without issue. The disability, of course, lasted all this time; that is to say, that at any time in all these years, he or his personal representative might have brought suit to recover back the property. Not only this, but the law — so anxious is it to guard against all possible fraud or accident — gives the heirs of such a *non-compos* ten years after his death in which to institute proceedings. Now, who are the heirs of Lewis? Why, Robert and his children. It remained for us to find them."

Mrs. Gould's growing interest in her lawyer's story could not be disguised.

"We soon came upon their track. Robert, who seems to have been a shiftless creature, stumbling through life, and getting his living at hap-hazard, died many years ago, leaving an only son, who proved as great a ne'er-do-weel as his father. The son married and died, as his father before him, leaving his widow nothing but one poor sickly child."

"And this child" —

"Is the heir of Damen's Row."

"Have you found him?"

"Yes; but we had a long and very blind search. The father disappeared from this vicinity many years ago, and we could only learn that he had gone into the interior of the State."

"And have you seen him?"

"The father? He is dead."

"No, no: the child; the heir of the estate."

"Not yet."

"Is he poor?"

"Yes."

"And as worthless as his father, I suppose."

"Quite the contrary, if I am correctly informed."

"Well, judge, I must confess you have done what I little thought you would at the outset, — very much interested me in your story. But I have not changed, and never shall change, my resolution to have nothing more to do with it personally. If this young person is the rightful heir to the estate, and as deserving as you represent him, I shall be rejoiced to see him put into possession of it."

"Mrs. Gould," said the judge, with a little twinkle in his eye, "there are two facts connected with the case, which I have not yet told you."

"Indeed!"

"One is, that this heir is a young woman."

"But you said" —

"I beg pardon: you assumed that the person was of masculine gender, and I did not correct you."

"Oh, well! it makes very little difference."

"It may make a good deal."

"How?"

"That young woman is now an inmate of your family."

"Naomi!" cried Mrs. Gould, starting to her feet.

"Yes."

CHAPTER X.

THE DEFENDANT.

“WHAT d’you s’pose *he* wants?”

Mrs. Badger laid down a letter her daughter had handed her to read, and pushed her spectacles up on her nose.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” returned the latter, putting aside her work, and going over to the cactus, a sure sign of perplexity.

“You goin’ to go?”

Miss Badger did not answer.

“V’lumny!”

“What?”

“You goin’ to see him?”

“I don’t know.”

“He’s *her* lawyer: she’s been settin’ him up to it, mark my word. ‘Claim against you,’” continued Mrs. Badger, referring to the letter: “don’t see what on earth—can’t be Ferrette this time, that’s sure; they hate each other like dogs and cats. What you goin’ to do, V’lumny?”

Miss Badger pursued her task oblivious of the question.

“Eh?”

“I’m thinkin’.”

Mrs. Badger sat watching her daughter for some time in silence. The latter went round and round the huge plant, slowly wiping all the leaves within her reach. At length she turned, and said quietly, —

“I guess I’d better go.”

The afternoon of the day in which she received the

above-mentioned letter, Miss Badger followed her mother into Judge Clark's office. The unexpected sight of Joe Piverton, seated in the ante-room, startled her. She stopped short, and barely suppressed an exclamation. Her mother evidently shared her suspicions, for she cried, —

"Well, young man, you at the bottom of this?"

"Mother!"

"What — that is — did you call to see me?" cried the astonished Joe.

"V'lumny — my daughter — got a letter from the lawyer here."

"Ah! you mean Judge Clark; sit down, and I'll speak to him."

Joe went into the next room, and came back directly, saying, —

"Walk in: the judge will see you."

Judge Clark knew his visitors by sight. He bowed without rising, pointed to seats, and proceeded at once to business.

"Mrs. and Miss Badger, I think?"

"Yes," from the former.

"I have asked you to call," pursued the judge, throwing himself back in his chair, and twirling his eyeglass, "upon a very important matter which nearly concerns your own interests, and which, I fear, will prove a painful surprise."

"We're used to that," remarked Mrs. Badger dryly.

"You are still, I believe, in possession of the property called Damen's Row, which you bought in, or which came into your possession through the sheriff's sale in 'Badger *agst.* Gould'?"

"Well, s'pose we be?" retorted Mrs. Badger, disregarding a warning cough from her daughter.

"It's with reference to that, that I asked you to call."

"We expected 'twas."

"You will be surprised to hear that I have discovered a serious, I may say a fatal flaw, in the title to that estate."

"No, sir, I ain't surprised a mite."

"Indeed!"

"But I shall be, if we ever git through with flaws an' laws an' flummery in that pesky business."

Miss Badger did not speak; but her face was pale, and her eyes were black as coals.

"I fear this is a more serious matter than you think," pursued the judge. "If my position is sound, as I have every reason to believe, it will result in the entire subversion of your right and title in the property."

"Is *she* doin' it?" asked Miss Badger, speaking for the first time.

"Who?"

"Miss Gould."

"No: Mrs. Gould, of course, has no better title than you. It is another party."

"Oh!"

"Well, what's it all about?" asked Mrs. Badger impatiently.

"Hm — m," returned the judge, eying the two ladies critically. "I doubt if I can explain it so that you can understand."

Mrs. Badger repressed a sniff of derision.

"It's a point so purely technical that I fear I shall have to ask you to come here with your counsel."

"Mother'n' I don't pretend to be very smart, but we know a little something, I hope," interposed Miss Badger flatly.

"Excuse me, madam," explained the judge: "if I thought there was the least chance of my explaining it to you satisfactorily, I would not hesitate. It involves a difficult point in the law of real property, which only a lawyer would clearly perceive."

"T seems almost a pity we can't understand it, if

it's so important," said Miss Badger with no apparent trace of irony in tone or look.

"Why, of course, I can say to you in a general way," continued the judge, regarding the younger lady curiously, "that many years ago this estate was wrongfully devised — that is, given away by will — by one who had not the right to devise it; that the mistake was never discovered until the other day; that the law still allows the mistake to be rectified, for reasons which I will show to your attorney; that the heir of the injured person is now living, cognizant of the facts, and has intrusted the matter to my hands for settlement."

"I s'pose you mean," said Miss Badger after a pause, "that you can git the property away from us?"

"I mean, so far as I have yet had occasion to express myself, that it legally belongs to another person whom I represent."

"An' if we don't give it up, you'll go to law about it?" continued Miss Badger, disregarding the lawyer's nice distinction.

"That is a question for the future," said the judge; adding, with a touch of pleasantry, "you've been the plaintiff so long, it's only fair you should be the defendant for a while."

"Well, you'd better begin, an' not waste time talkin' about it," exclaimed Mrs. Badger. "We sha'n't give it up. You can count on that. We had too much fuss gittin' it."

"Perhaps you had better talk it over with your counsel before making up your mind," said the judge, with unmoved confidence.

"Is that all you wanted to say?" asked Miss Badger in the same unemphatic way.

"I think that's all at present."

"Come, mother; then I guess we'll go."

It was only after a second and more peremptory

summons that Miss Badger again appeared at Judge Clark's office — this time with her counsel. The two lawyers discussed the question at length, Miss Badger meanwhile sitting by in anxious silence, with her eyes riveted upon the face of her attorney.

When the interview was over, and they were fairly in the street, she lost no time in demanding that gentleman's opinion, and was plainly very much disappointed that he requested time for consideration before giving it.

The next day, however, in compliance with the urgency of his client, he ventured to say, that, although there was much plausibility in the plaintiff's case, it yet admitted of sufficient doubt to justify a defence.

Perhaps Miss Badger had expected a less conservative answer, perhaps she had taken a different view of the matter herself: at any rate, her impatience suddenly disappeared; and, very much to her attorney's surprise, on hearing his advice she arranged her lips with deliberation, and said, —

"Well, I guess I'll think it over myself."

And she did think it over. Indeed, for the next week she nearly wiped the rind off the cactus in thinking it over. There her astonished mother found her at all hours of the day, and oftentimes far into the night, wiping and thinking it over. Every day, too, she went out, and was gone several hours without accounting for her absence, until the maternal patience was exhausted.

"V'lumny, where on earth have you been?" cried the mother, as the daughter appeared late in the afternoon after one of these absences.

"I've been out on a little business."

"What business? Damenses?"

"Yes."

"What you goin' to do?"

"I don't know."

"Well, it's 'bout time you did."

"I've been thinkin' it over."

"What you been out this afternoon for?"

"I've been takin' advice."

"Been to your lawyer?"

"No."

"You hain't been goin' to another, I hope."

"Yes, I have."

"That what you been doing every day?"

Miss Badger coughed.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Have you been goin' to a different lawyer every day, I say?"

"Ahem — well, yes."

"How many you been to?"

"I guess I've been to six."

"Well, you're crazy."

"P'r'aps I be."

"What's the matter with your own lawyer? What d'he say?"

"Said we'd better go to law."

"Well, so we had: I hope you ain't goin' to back down 'fore them folks."

"He might 'a' said so because he wanted the job."

"So the others might 'a' wanted the job too."

"No: I told them they couldn't have it, an' all I wanted was advice."

"An' what d'they say?"

"They said I'd better not go to law — all but one of 'em."

"What do they want you to do? give up?" inquired Mrs. Badger in an effervescing tone.

"They think p'r'aps we can fix it some way."

"Well, you knew that 'thout goin' to them, an' you must have squandered a sight of money on 'em."

"P'r'aps it's cheaper than goin' to law 'thout knowin' what you're 'bout."

"Pooh! How're you goin' to fix it?"

"I don't know : I'm goin' to see."

Miss Badger's legal adviser might not have been so much surprised at his client's decision, if he had known all that lady's movements of late ; and he certainly would not have been so much astonished at her persistence in her own views, if he had been aware upon what eminent legal advice they were based.

It was an occasion of great triumph to Judge Clark, and of immeasurable indignation to Mrs. Badger, when the result of the negotiations was made known, by which Miss Badger agreed upon an early day to make peaceable surrender of the estate, provided she should not be called upon to account for the rents and profits received during her possession.

Meantime, it will not be forgotten that the suit of "*Ferrette agst. Badger*" was still pending ; and it chanced that between the making and the carrying out of the above agreement, the plaintiff in that suit called to confer with the defendant.

The defendant was found where she had spent much of her time for several days past, hovering in rather a vague way about her thinking-post. She was paler than usual, and perhaps a little unstrung after so much "thinkin'," for she started at his appearance. Mrs. Badger did not start. She maintained a masterful composure, regarding him through her levelled spectacles in stony silence, without, however, deigning to return his salute.

"Ah !" he began, smiling his old smile, and rubbing his hands, "I am glad to find you at home. I hope you are well, Miss Badger."

"Yes, I guess I'm well enough."

"I have been expecting to hear from you for some time."

"Mother'n I don't write a great many letters."

"As I didn't hear, I thought I'd drop around again, and have a talk."

"Oh!"

"I hope you have thought more favorably of my proposition."

"I don't know's I remember" —

"You cannot surely have forgotten. I made a very large reduction on my claim."

"Seems to me we told you, mother'n I didn't think much of that."

"Yes; but you answered then without consideration."

"I guess we haven't changed our minds."

Mr. Ferrette jumped up, and paced the floor several moments with his old scowl.

"Look here, Miss Badger," he exclaimed at length, resuming his seat, "you and your mother don't do me justice. I want to do the fair thing by you. More than that, I am willing to do the handsome thing. I have come around here to-day determined to close this matter up if it is possible. Come, now, what do you say? I'll meet you half way."

Miss Badger seated herself, put back an imaginary lock over her ear, and regarded the speaker with attention.

"To show you that I mean business in this matter, I will sacrifice my own interests as I never did before in my professional experience. I will make another large concession. Yes; for the sake of squaring this thing up now and here, I will call my claim in round numbers forty thousand dollars!"

"Take care; don't rob yourself!" interjected Mrs. Badger in a tone that need not be described.

"What do you say?" pursued Mr. Ferrette, disregarding the interruption.

Miss Badger arranged her lips, and was silent.

"If this were a new question," continued the attorney, "I should expect you to take time to consider

it; but you have had time, ample time. You must have thought it over thoroughly long ago. You must have made up your mind as to what you are willing to do."

"P'r'aps there are folks that have as much money as that. Mother'n I hain't."

"Money? it isn't a question of ready money. You have the property: you can give security on that."

A sudden light shone in Miss Badger's eyes. A queer little look passed over her face. She coughed, and smoothed the hair over her ear.

"Why, no, she can't: there" —

"Mother!"

The daughter's voice, though weak as ever, was almost imperative. The mother checked herself as usual.

"It wouldn't be no use," returned Miss Badger at length, in her thinnest drawl, "talkin' to us of such a sum as that."

Mr. Ferrette sprang to his feet with a muttered oath, and walked to the window.

"In Heaven's name, what do you expect to give?" he exclaimed, whirling about the next minute.

"We didn't expect to be sworn at an' hollered at, an' we ain't goin' to be," exclaimed Mrs. Badger emphatically.

"'Expect?'" repeated Miss Badger: "well, I don't know's we fixed upon any exact sum; but we didn't expect to give more'n half that."

"Half of it? What are you talkin' about, V'lumny? We never meant to give more'n a quarter of it, you know very well; and that's a good sight too much."

For once Miss Badger cast an unmistakable look of gratitude at her mother for the interruption.

Mr. Ferrette meantime strode up and down the floor with his scalp rolled forward in the old-time fashion. Suddenly he stopped, and took up his hat.

Miss Badger watched him with curious, intense, almost trembling interest.

"So you're goin'?" said Mrs. Badger derisively.

"Yes, I'm going!" returned the baffled attorney turning about, almost shrieking with rage, "and I'm going for good. I have had enough of you. You are a couple of d—d blood-sucking vampires!"

Miss Badger betrayed a sudden and extraordinary agitation at the course things were taking. She had risen from her seat, and stood with one hand half extended towards the enraged man. Her coal-black eyes looked almost startling in her deathly-white face. She seemed as if longing yet dreading to speak.

"I don't think it helps things any to git mad," she at length faltered. "I'm willin' to talk, I'm sure: I'm willin' to do what I can."

"Why don't you, then?"

"I can't make up my mind in a minute."

"That's no excuse: you've had time enough to make up your mind. If you've got any thing to say to me that's fit for a white man to hear, out with it! But I give you warning, you can't Jew me, and you needn't try."

"You said, I b'lieve," returned Miss Badger meekly, rising, and going over to her plant, "that you'd be willin' to take a mortgage on the property?"

"Yes: I said I would, and I will. I ought to have my money down after all this time; but, if I can't get it, I must do the best I can."

"Well," continued Miss Badger, busying herself with the plant, "it was your own idea, wasn't it?"

"What?"

"Takin' the mortgage."

"Yes: it was my own idea, because it is my only hope of ever getting paid."

"I s'pose you'd give me a receipt?"

"Yes; a dozen if you want."

"So that you will never come upon me again?"

"No : why do you ask that?"

Miss Badger coughed : it was several moments before she could answer.

"I was thinkin' that if any thing should happen to the land" —

"I'll take my risk of any thing's happening to the land," returned Mr. Ferrette, with a scornful laugh.

"Why, V'lunny, I thought" —

"Mother, I wish you would be still, an' I wish you would go away!" cried Miss Badger in a manner so utterly unlike her own, that her mother stared at her in astonishment.

Miss Badger went round and round her plant for some minutes in silence. She at length said in a voice that might have come from a crying doll, —

"Well, I'm willin' to give you a mortgage of twenty-five thousand dollars on the property, if you'll give me such a receipt as you say ; but," she continued, turning around, and speaking more slowly and emphatically, "it'll have to be done right off, and" —

"V'lunny Badger, you're a ravin' lunatic!"

"I shall never offer you a single cent more," continued Miss Badger, regardless of her mother, "and I will never speak another word with you about it."

"There was a dead silence for several moments.

"Done!" at length cried Mr. Ferrette, jumping up. "I will go and look at the records, draw the papers, and be back here in two hours."

He seized his hat, and departed without another word.

CHAPTER XI.

"THE ERRING SPIRIT HIES TO HIS CONFINES."

JUDGE CLARK sits at his own desk, regarding a large parchment sheet, at the bottom of which is written a woman's name, flanked on the one hand by a round red seal, and on the other by his own vigorous signature as witness. The name, written in faint lines, with many weak flourishes, is not unfamiliar: it is, "Volumnia Badger."

In fact, Miss Badger, attended by her mother and her counsel, has but just left the office, whither, according to appointment, she came to execute the quit-claim deed, which the judge now holds in his hand.

Another turn of the wheel, another link in the chain of title, another owner to "Damen's Row." Meanwhile the "Row" itself, insensible to all the pother made about it, stands yonder, looking down with blank, grim, unvarying face, upon the swarming human ants that come and go before its weather-beaten walls. But what of the ghost? Does he still come and go upon his haunt? If he would but stop a moment in his aimless wandering, open his spectral lips, and speak, with what a fine scorn, with what ghostly derisive laughter, would he regard the strutting little manikins that come by virtue of a solemn jugglery to assume over him lordly airs of ownership to-day, and to-morrow pass on to moulder back into their native dust! But the ghost's probation is nearly ended, his earthly watch is almost over. His step grows fainter in the old hall; and his spectral form fades and fades away to nothingness in the dawning light of peace, happiness, and re-instated right.

Judge Clark makes small account of the ghost. He would, moreover, be highly indignant at the phrase, "solemn jugglery;" and justly enough. It is no jugglery to him, but high and mighty business. He has gained a great victory by means of it. He is contemplating the result of that victory. Not very much to look at, surely, that sheet of paper; but the judge's keen eye, behind the judge's polished eye-glass, sees its great legal and moral significance.

Suddenly the judge picks up a pen, and begins a letter. "My dear Mrs. Gould," he writes; then stops, rubs his head, puts down his pen, casts his eye over the docket, over the rows of books before him, over the furniture of his office, then back again upon his desk, where it falls once more upon the name "Volumnia Badger," followed by the round red seal, which doubtless stands to him for a big sanguinary period, marking the end of the long conflict.

At all events, the sight of it apparently puts a period to his hesitation; for he looks at his watch, calls out to Piverton to see when the next train goes on the New York and New Haven Railroad, folds up Miss Badger's deed, and puts it in his inner pocket, takes his hat, and hurries away, telling Piverton, as he passes through the outer room, that he shall not be back until evening.

His motive for going himself upon this errand is a little uncertain. Perhaps, in a matter of so much importance, and in the interest of an old friend, he thinks he can waive ceremony; perhaps he wants to startle his old friend out of her cold scepticism and indifference with regard to the matter, by the swiftness and brilliancy of his victory; perhaps he anticipates pleasure in being the bearer of good news; perhaps, like other conquerors written of in history, he wants to sit down and talk over his triumph.

His old friend receives him as usual,—cordially. As he takes his seat opposite her in the little parlor, he

regards her more critically, perhaps, on account of what he has come to tell. He sees a difference in her: he suddenly becomes aware that she is an old woman. Her hair is snowy white. What then? It has been white a long time: he may not have remarked it before, on account of the vigor and energy of her bearing. To-day that vigor and energy seem wanting, and the change in her is striking. Her eyes have lost something of their keenness, her voice of its crisp incisiveness; but her face is still alive with its old intelligence, and strong with its old firmness.

She shows no curiosity at her counsellor's appearance; she asks no questions; she sits and talks about common things with her old-time dignity and ease.

The judge may have felt his own ardor somewhat dampened by his reception; but if so, with the address of a man of the world, he let no sign of it appear.

"Of course," he said, taking advantage of a little lull in the conversation, "you are prepared to hear that I have come again on business."

"I try to be prepared for every thing," returned his hostess gravely. "I only hope you are not taking fruitless trouble."

"You will need no preparation for what I come to say to-day. I trust you will find it good news."

"I am growing to feel that good news is little better than bad," she said with averted face: "I am growing to dread news of any kind. All I ask for during the little time I have to live is, that things may stay as they are: any change now must be for the worst."

"Tut, tut! why, Mrs. Gould, that is new talk for you: it is neither fact nor philosophy. I have come in good time to prove to you the contrary," said the judge with a burst of cheerfulness. "I have news which I shall venture to call good, and which I am sure cannot prove shocking."

"Good or bad, if it is inevitable it must be accepted, and I am quite ready to hear it," she said, with a return of her old proud confidence. "There is but one mood for business; and that is an iron composure, which, if I do not feel, I will at least try and assume."

"Perhaps it will be necessary, in order to disguise your satisfaction," returned the judge with a re-assuring smile. "But to come down to business. What I have to say to-day can be told in a few words. I need not, I suppose, recapitulate what I said to you on my former visit."

"No: I remember it perfectly."

"Very good. I am happy to say now, that your refusal to take part in the proceedings I suggested did not deter me. The case seemed to me so clear, that I had no choice. At all events, I made up my mind to skirmish a little, to develop the strength of the enemy. I did so. I looked for strong opposition. To my surprise, I met with comparatively little."

"They may have profited by their former experience, as I did."

"Perhaps. At any rate, I was staggered at my own success. They showed the white flag at the first shot. In a word, I may say I was entirely successful."

"You mean that you have recovered back the estate?" asked Mrs. Gould in even, measured tones.

"Precisely that."

There was a silence of a whole minute. The former mistress of Damen's, looking out of the window, idly followed the flight of a swallow until it passed out of her field of vision. Then, turning to the judge, she said quietly, and somewhat coldly, —

"It is great news. I ought, I suppose, to feel elated, overjoyed. I feel neither: I am not even surprised. Your words, as you speak, come to me like words I have heard before. Perhaps I have dreamt it: I cannot say. The place, the time, our whole talk, is but

the rehearsal of a scene I seem already to have been through."

The judge looked at his old friend curiously before replying.

"You evidently counted upon my success. You were prepared for it by my former visit: it is not so strange."

"Are all the formalities—is it all done now?" she inquired in a tone of weariness.

"Every thing is done as regards the transfer, and the estate now stands in the name of Naomi Dill. I have not, of course, notified the tenants of the change of ownership: I had no authority to do that. I have not even put the deed upon record: I have brought it along as my letter of credential," added the judge, smiling, as he took the paper from his pocket.

"I shall be glad for her sake. I say 'shall;' for, strange to say, I have no present feeling of elation."

"Perhaps you do not quite realize it yet."

"Perhaps not: I do not know. What I meant to say was, that any good fortune that may befall her is deserved. She is a very worthy person. It could not fall into better hands. I ought to be glad: I think I shall be glad of it for her sake."

If the experienced old lawyer was puzzled at his client's manner, if he was disappointed at the way in which his news had been received, he took good care to conceal these feelings under his inscrutable professional mask.

"Shall I see the young lady? or shall I leave you to make the announcement to her?" he asked presently.

"Do it yourself, by all means. She is a little ill to-day, but I think she will see you. She has been unwell for a week past. My son, too, is indisposed. My house is a hospital at present. I am the only able-bodied one here. The rising generation grows valetu-ary. It is we elders, judge, that must keep up the re," she exclaimed, rising with a sudden touch of

vivacity, and advancing towards the door. "I will send Naomi down to you."

As Mrs. Gould said, Naomi had been for some time indisposed, keeping her room, although denying that she was ill. If Mrs. Gould discovered any coincidence between this illness, and a certain dejected, morose mood, that had all at once fallen upon her son, she gave her thoughts no tongue. She attended to the comfort of each, without plaguing them with questions.

When now she went to Naomi's room, and announced that Judge Clark was waiting to see her on business, Naomi, who was pacing the floor, went and looked out at the window several moments before speaking.

"I do not want to see him."

"It is necessary."

There was another silence. Mrs. Gould paused on the threshold for her words to take effect.

"I will go, then," was the impatient response.

Judge Clark had a long interview with his young client. He went away at length without seeing Mrs. Gould, who sent her excuses. Naomi retired to her own room without a word to anybody; and so it happened that nothing was said to Noll of the whole affair that night.

The next morning Mrs. Gould herself was not well. She did not get up until midday. At luncheon-time she sent to Naomi's room to see what the latter would have to eat. The servant came back presently, to say that Miss Dill was not there.

"Look about the house and in the garden," said Mrs. Gould calmly.

The servant came back again with a blank face, to say that there wasn't a trace of Miss Dill anywhere.

"She has gone out for a walk," said Mrs. Gould, struggling to repress the growing alarm in her face.

And Mrs. Gould was right. Miss Dill had gone out for a walk. But Miss Dill was gone a long time. Hour after hour the daylight wore away: nightfall came, and Miss Dill did not return. Mrs. Gould no longer attempted to appear unconcerned. She did not disguise her alarm. With characteristic energy she instituted a vigorous search; she sent messengers flying this way and that; she was just about telegraphing to the city, and publishing her loss, when the evening mail brought an explanation. Luckily she received it before Noll's arrival. She did not at once tell him. She consulted his face to see if he had heard the news on his way from the dépôt. He had evidently heard nothing. She waited until after tea, — until they were seated alone before the fire in the little parlor. Even then she hesitated; the evening wore on; Noll read the paper, and fell asleep in his chair. She sat for a long time looking at his jaded face, looking, and dreading the task before her. The clock struck ten. She started, leaned forward, and touched his arm.

"Noll, I have something to say to you."

"Very well."

"Are you too heavy to listen?"

"Oh, no!"

"You look tired. I can scarcely realize, when I look at your pale, weary face, and your tall figure, that you are my old baby, the little boy I have so often held in my lap. Noll, I have said and done many things, in all these years since you were a child, that are very distasteful to you, and painful to me; but as always because I thought that it was my duty, it was best for your welfare and happiness; and now I feel that you bear me no ill-will on account of it you have quite forgiven me."

She looked at him in an eager, inquiring way, that was almost painful.

"Forgive! What nonsense is the dear old lady talking?" he exclaimed, rising, half-yawning, and putting his arm tenderly about his mother. "Doesn't she know I would forgive her if she cut off my right hand?"

"So you might if it were your own hand. But what if it were that of some one else who was very dear to you?"

"Why, I should conclude she wanted the hand more than the owner, or that she had some other good reason."

"Take care, my son, do not be too sure: you are about to be put to the test. I have done you a wrong. I have never had any doubt of the forgiveness of my child before. I am in doubt now, in terrible doubt. Pity me! Have patience with me: I shall not be with you long. Remember, too, that you are all I have. Remember that, in doing as I did, I thought of nothing but you; that I tried to act for your good. Remember," she concluded, releasing herself from his embrace, and putting the envelope in his hand,—"remember, when you read these letters, that I am your mother."

Noll took the packet, and stared in wonder after the speaker. The rustle of her silken skirt died away on the threshold, the gleam of white lace upon her stately head vanished in the gloom, and he was alone. He sat for several minutes, thinking of her strange words and manner. At length his eye fell upon the packet. It contained two letters: he opened and read them.

I.

MY DEAR COUSIN,—I hope this will reach you before my absence is discovered, that you may be spared all needless alarm. I have left your house and family, not to return. It is a step I have long been meditating. I did not speak to you, because I

did not wish to engage in useless discussion as to my motives and plans, because I did not feel strong enough to take leave of you.

You have been the best, almost the only friend, I ever knew. You took me from the very ditch, to your heart and home. You made me a friend and an equal. I can never repay you. The little return in my power I will make. The poor sacrifice of my own life's happiness, — would it were life itself! — I do not grudge you.

"You talked to me the other day about Noll. I was slow to understand you. I was indulging in a dream, — a wild, mad dream of impossible happiness. You opened my eyes. I did not see before, the wrong that I might have done him, that I might have done myself and you. Thank Heaven, your words came in time! I have since proved the truth of your surmise. For a moment, earth seemed heaven. His love was the most precious thing God ever gave me. I rejected it. I gave him up. I left him to you. The trial was hard: it was crushing. Was it no reparation for what I owe you?

I have found employment. I shall be able to earn my living. You need have no anxiety about me. I shall think constantly of you. I shall pray for your happiness, and pray that you may never have cause to regret your noble charity to the poor blind outcast.

As I write these words, I feel that the light, a feeble light, is returning to me; that the curse that has weighed me down, ever since I entered that dreadful place, is lifting, is passing away. God is still good.

Your faithful kinswoman,

NAOMI DILL.

II.

BROADWAY, LAW CHAMBERS OF SAMUEL CLARK.

MY DEAR MRS. GOULD, — I have to inform you of the turning of another leaf in the extraordinary history of "Damen's Row," — a leaf more strange and romantic than any that have preceded it.

Miss Dill, whom I left at your house late yesterday afternoon, surprised me by an early call at my office this morning. Her business was more surprising than her visit. She requested me to draw up, then and there, a transfer of the entire property to your son Oliver. I was naturally astonished and reluctant. I urged every objection I could think of: but she persisted, and I had no option but to comply; feeling, that, as it is all in the family, any thing wrong or ill-judged in the step cannot result in permanent harm. She waited until the deed was drawn,

"THE SPIRIT HIES TO HIS CONFINE." 305

executed it, and requested me to enclose the within letter in my note notifying you of the conveyance.

Congratulating you upon the happy turn affairs have taken in this so long troublous matter, I am, with many wishes for your health and prosperity,

Very faithfully,

Your obedient servant,

SAMUEL CLARK.

CHAPTER XII.

FOUND.

WHEN Mrs. Gould came down in the morning, she found Noll restlessly pacing the parlor floor, following in an absent way the squares in the carpet. She saw at a glance that he had not been to bed. She stopped near the door, as if doubtful of her reception. He looked up, and stretched out his hand as Ahasuerus of old did his sceptre. Mother and son embraced as they had never done before in their lives.

"It's all right, old lady. I don't know what I should have done if—but we needn't think of that now, thank God. This letter atones for every thing. It is worth while to have suffered for such an end. We have found her out at last. She is a queen, a grand creature,—this blind beggar you have been bringing up. Where are your fairy-tales and romances now? This is fact: here is a real princess; her royal nature shines through her rags. It is time we kneeled to her."

He was garrulous in his happiness. He was glowing and grandiloquent. It was the natural recoil after all that had been. In the cold morning light he looked worn and haggard, his hair was dishevelled, his beard unshaven; but in his ecstatic mood these little vanities of life were dwarfed to nothings. He went out to breakfast without making his toilet: he sat down at the table, and ate whatever was nearest at hand, as unconscious of his actions as a madman. His mother regarded him with evident concern, trembling, perhaps, to think of what might have been if some of her own plans had not miscarried.

After breakfast he was in a fever to be off. When at length he came down stairs ready to go, he found his mother in the hall with her bonnet and shawl on.

"I am going with you," she said quietly. He stopped, and seemed a little discomposed.

"It is I who am to blame — I who injured her," she explained.

"You are right. Come !"

When they arrived in the city they took a carriage, and drove directly to the asylum. They asked for Miss Dill. The man hesitated. Yes, Miss Dill was there, but Miss Dill had given positive orders that no one was to be admitted.

Mrs. Gould thought a moment, and sent for the matron. A sedate, middle-aged woman presently appeared, who seemed acquainted with the visitors, and greeted them cordially.

"My cousin Miss Dill is here?"

"Yes."

"She has given orders, we are told, that none of her friends are to be admitted. Something has happened that makes it necessary for us to see her. Now, if" —

Mrs. Gould hesitated. The matron gave a nod of intelligence.

"I see: if I can help you, I will. I don't know, though" —

"I will take the responsibility," said Mrs. Gould anxiously.

The matron glanced up at the great clock on the wall.

"She'll be coming down in a few minutes to give a music-lesson in that room at the end of the hall: if you" —

"Certainly: we will go in there."

"The superintendent sends the scholars down to her. I will give him a hint to wait a few minutes if you want to talk," said the matron as she led the way

along the hall, and ushered her visitors into a small, square room, which contained nothing but some settees ranged around the wall, and a large grand piano somewhat the worse for wear.

Noll and his mother sat down there, and waited in silence. Five minutes had hardly elapsed, when a light step was heard outside. The door opened, and Naomi appeared. She stopped a moment upon the threshold to satisfy herself that the children were not there, and then, as if unfamiliar with the room, groped her way across to the piano. Noll was upon the point of starting up to guide her, but his mother checked him.

She sat down, and began to play. Mrs. Gould rose, hesitated a moment, then went towards her, speaking softly.

Naomi started from her seat as if to fly from the room.

"Naomi, it is I. Do not be alarmed, do not run away from me! I have come to see you. I have come to beg your pardon. I have come to thank you. You have heaped coals of fire upon my head, that have burnt through to my heart. You have returned good for evil. It was a cruel, but noble, punishment. I was a poor, sordid creature. You have shown me how to be magnanimous."

Mrs. Gould's voice was thrilled with emotion: there was deep, unaffected sincerity in every tone and look; yet she was majestic in her very humility. It was pathetic to see her thus: it proved almost overpowering to her poor blind kinswoman.

"Stop, stop! do not talk so," she gasped. "You do not —"

"I must make what poor atonement I can," continued Mrs. Gould unmindful of the interruption: "I would have mercilessly sacrificed you to my own ambition. I would have put you out of my path as remorselessly as I have done every thing else in life that interfered with my purposes. My dear child, you

have taught me a lesson I shall not forget. You have shown me that there is a finer pride, a nobler ambition, than my own. You have made the little I have done for you look still less by the side of your grand sacrifice."

"No, no!" cried Naomi, half-choking. "I only gave you back your own. I had no right to it. I had no right to stand in your way, — to come into your family, and rob you of your fortune and your son. I cannot" —

"Hush! Control yourself, my dear. It is all for good. We know each other now. We have all had a hard trial: we shall never need another like it. After all your generosity, I need not ask — I am sure you will forgive me."

"Forgive" —

It was in vain: the words would not come. Mrs. Gould folded the trembling girl to her bosom with an emotion she attempted no longer to control.

"My dear child," she said after a little, "I have come to tell you that I cannot accept your sacrifice. I have come to tell you that I cannot get along without you; that you must come back, and share it all with me."

Stretching out her hand to Noll, Mrs. Gould continued, —

"You said you gave up to me the most precious thing you had on earth. My darling," continued the mother, placing her son's hand in that of her kinswoman, "I come to give it back to you, to give it back with all my heart: it is the most precious thing I have on earth. Can we not share it?"

This was the last drop to the brimming cup. The culmination of pure joy proved intolerable.

"Light! light!" cried the fainting girl, as she fell unconscious into Noll's arms.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

SEVERAL months had elapsed since Mrs. Gould received the following letter from Col. Gould. The colonel had been for some time travelling on the Continent, and the letter was dated from Paris.

DEAR ANNE, — I was glad to get news of you after so long a silence, and to see that you write with something of your old vigor and cheerfulness. 'Tis time Fortune smiled on you again : she has looked black enough the past few years. I am rejoiced, too, to hear of Noll's marriage. I send, by the mail that carries this, my congratulations to him personally. I hope he may have the happiness he deserves, which is saying all that is necessary. I do not feel much acquainted with Cousin Dill, which I am aware is my own fault, and owing doubtless to my gloomy and repellant manners. None the less I recognize her sterling character and noble disposition. Her surrender of the estate in Noll's favor was eminently characteristic. The marriage, as you suggest, is an admirable settlement of that question. It is, however, a strange freak of chance that brings "Damen's" back into the family.

And now I have a piece of news to tell on my own account. You will be surprised to hear that the announcement of Noll's marriage removes the only obstacle to my own. The Houghtons, as you may perhaps have heard, have been of late living in this city after an extended European tour. I have seen much of Helen. My former esteem has gradually ripened into affection which proves now to be mutual. Nothing, however, had passed between us, beyond ordinary social civilities, until your news arrived. The thought that Noll might renew his claim, that they might come together again, forbade the pressing of my own suit.

Your letter at once paved the way to my happiness. I was surprised and delighted to find my feelings reciprocated, and I now have the honor to announce to you my engagement. I trust that you still retain something of your former affection for my future wife, and that we shall meet cordially and without constraint.

My fortunate speculations after the war enable me now to indulge in an establishment congenial to my taste, and worthy the charming and beautiful woman who has consented to share it with me. We shall be married in a few weeks, and return home in the fall, when I hope to find you all well and as happy as your letter justifies me in expecting. Meantime I am

Very faithfully your brother,

RICHARD.

We say, some months had passed since Mrs. Gould received the above letter, — months in which several important events had taken place in her own family ; owing to which she was now again sitting, one fine September afternoon, amidst the slanting shadows of certain grand old Corinthian columns we have before told of. Again the westering sun poured its flood of light over the smooth lawn ; again the soft breeze rustled the leaves in the overhanging boughs, and made the shadows dance gayly up and down the broad stone steps ; again the piano sounded from within ; and again Mrs. Gould sat in pensive attitude, re-instated upon her old throne.

She may be thinking of the old times, of that very day, perhaps, when we first saw her years ago : there is much to recall it, and yonder, to complete the reminiscence, rolls a carriage along the dusty highway ; and here it comes anon up the avenue, up to the very door ; and forth from it steps a very familiar figure, who comes rustling up the stairs, and pours forth upon her astonished hostess a flood of salutation. How fresh the round, glowing face ! How pretty and graceful the manners ! How rich and dainty the toilet, and oh, how sweet the bell-like voice !

“Didn’t you hear of our arrival ? Why, the steamer got in last week. Here he comes — my husband ! Hasn’t he grown young ? and doesn’t he act his part beautifully as a Benedict ? Oh ! I assure you he does : everybody notices it. I used to be so afraid of him, he looked so fierce. He does sometimes now, I’ll admit ;

but then it means nothing, just nothing at all. He is a very lamb, the dearest good-natured creature in the world: aren't you, love? How natural it does look here! It always was a beautiful place, and so peaceful: it used to make me feel like a nun. It is such a relief after Paris, isn't it, Col. Dick, *plait-il?* — That's the way he does: makes me do all the talking, ask the questions, and answer them too. Ah, Naomi! why, I can hardly believe my eyes! how pretty you have grown! I don't wonder Noll fell in love with you: I declare, I must keep the colonel out of the way, he is susceptible too. But isn't it droll to think that you are Mrs. Gould, that we're both Mrs. Goulds? Why, bless my heart! we are all — there are three of us, three Mrs. Goulds. I never thought of it until this minute."

Mrs. Gould greeted her brother-in-law warmly, and his wife with attentive politeness. She listened calmly to the silvery warbler. Was she disenchanted of the old charm? Perhaps she had not her glasses on. Certainly there could be nothing more distinctively pretty than the vision before her of blooming health and Parisian elegance.

As for Naomi, she treated the colonel and his wife in a manner so simple, easy, and cordial, that it procured from the latter several little irrepressible outbursts of, "Why, Naomi, how you *have* improved!" and, "I declare, you are quite charming!"

And so they came and went, and all was well; but Naomi evidently did not understand Mrs. Gould's turning about, as the carriage drove away, and embracing her so vigorously. It was such an irregular and uncalled-for proceeding. But when she laughingly described it to Noll in the evening, he completed her astonishment by behaving in the self-same irrational and incomprehensible way.

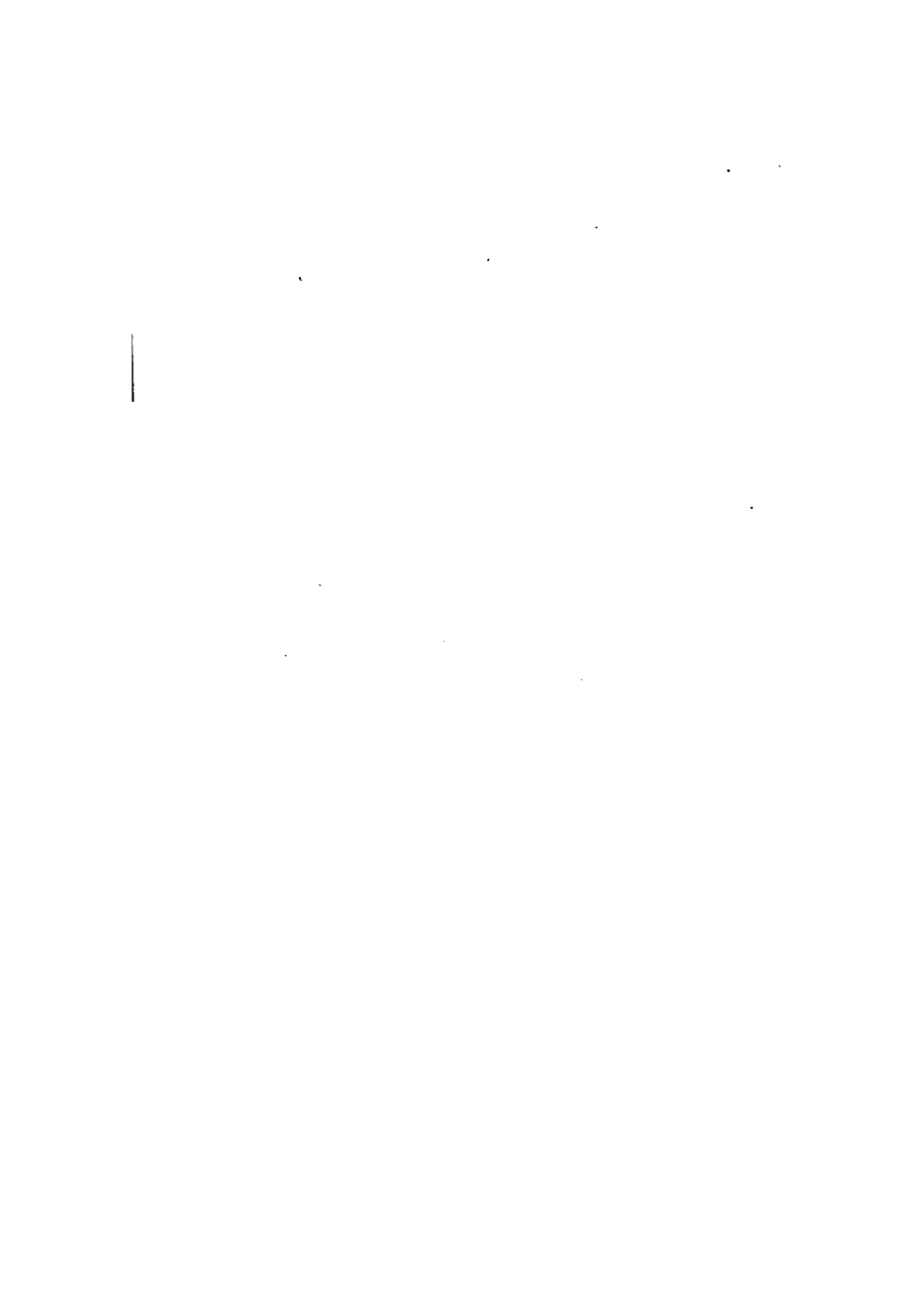
And now the scene-shifters stand ready to lower the

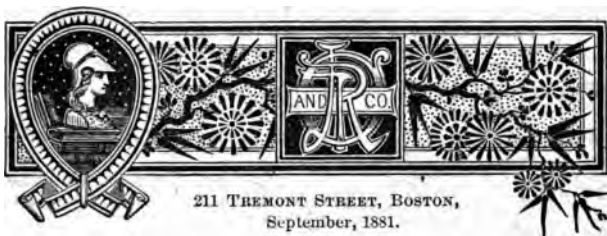
curtain. The red fires are lighted for the final tableau, the orchestra is playing the last strains of the *coda*; the prompt-boy has gone to summon the rest of the *dramatis personæ*, and here they come, hand in hand, for their final bow.

Mr. Ferrette and Miss Badger still sustain to each other, we are told, their old relations of plaintiff and defendant, in a course of litigation that bids fair to be endless; the latter, meanwhile, pursuing successfully her business of "mixin', bottlin', an' labellin'" the "Life Prolonger," which is now so securely fixed in popular favor as to yield a large and yearly increasing income. Mrs. Badger, too, has lived to see the community gradually become leavened with her views of the mission of women, and to hail the slow but sure advance of that grand reform, never failing to uplift her voice with effective eloquence upon every public and private occasion when the good of the cause can be furthered.

As to Joe Piverton, to whose happy agency Noll refers much of his own good fortune, he has long since found a place in the flourishing house of which Noll is now a partner, where the youngest and favorite Buster is also installed as office-boy.

And now, at last, the curtain is down, the lights are out, the company is gone. But the drama will not have been in vain if it has inspired some new love of the true, some new hatred of the false; if it has but taught some little lesson of patience, courage, or cheer, while uplifting for the passing hour life's burden of care.






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